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THE NEW RE-ISSUE.

Nos. 1 & 2 and A MAGNIFICENT PICTURE,
Edgworth Bess being Rescued from the Mohawks by Colonel Thorne.

BLUESKIN



LONDON:

Published by E. HARRISON, and Sold by all News
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THE FOLLOWING

SPLENDID PICTURES GRATIS

WITH

THE NEW RE-ISSUE

BLUESKIN.

By the Author of BLACK BESS.

- With Nos. 1 and 2, in Illuminated Wrapper,
- GRATIS** } EDGWORTH BESS BEING RESCUED FROM
THE MOHAWKS BY COLONEL THORNE
- GRATIS WITH }
No. 3. } BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ESCAPE
FROM JONATHAN WILD.
- GRATIS WITH }
No. 4. } JONATHAN WILD KILLS COLONEL THORNE
AND CAPTURES EDGWORTH BESS
- GRATIS WITH }
No. 5. } JACK SHEPPARD'S ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE
- GRATIS WITH }
No. 6. } BLUESKIN LEAPS FROM THE PARAPET OF
LONDON BRIDGE TO EVADE JONATHAN WILD
- GRATIS WITH }
No. 7. } THE BURNING OF NEWGATE DURING THE
TIME OF THE LORD GEORGE GORDON RIOTS
- GRATIS WITH }
No. 8. } PORTRAIT OF JACK SHEPPARD
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WORTH BESS ARE RESCUED FROM THE
POWER OF JONATHAN WILD
- GRATIS WITH }
No. 10. } THE BURGLARY.

THE FOLLOWING

SPLENDID PICTURES GRATIS

WITH

THE NEW RE-ISSUE

OF

THE BLACK HIGHWAYMAN,

By the Author of BLACK BESS.

- With Nos. 1 and 2, in Illuminated Wrapper,
- GRATIS** } THE BLACK HIGHWAYMAN AND CAPTAIN
HAWK RESCUING THE COUNTESS OF
BLACK LAKE
- GRATIS WITH }
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TREATED MAZEPPA FASHION
- GRATIS WITH }
No. 7. } CAPTAIN HAWK LEAPS SATAN OVER THE
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- GRATIS WITH }
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TRIBUTION ON THE PRINCE OF WALES
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No. 10. } "AN AWFUL SHRIEK THRILLED FROM THE
LIPS OF THE POLICE OFFICER AS HE FELT
THE FLOORING OF THE HUT SUDDENLY
GIVE WAY BENEATH HIS FEET"

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JACK SHEPPARD APPEALS TO THE SYMPATHIES OF THE LANDLADY.

The Governor found his new scheme answered admirably, and he continued to keep two turnkeys constantly in his cell.

"Only let me have Jack Sheppard once more!" he said—"only once more—and I will then take care he does not escape, even if I sit in the cell all the time with him myself!"

And so matters went on in the prison with tolerable smoothness.

Each hour Blueskin expected, in some way or other, to hear from Jack Sheppard; but time passed by, and no news came.

He inquired eagerly whether he had been recaptured, and was each time replied to in the negative.

He could tell by the manner in which he was answered that the men were speaking truth.

Where, then, could Jack be?

Blueskin could scarcely believe that he was even now ignorant of his whereabouts.

No. 81.—BLUESKIN.

And yet, owing to the peculiar circumstances which occurred, such was in reality the case.

Jack did not know until the night before the morning appointed for the execution, and that was too late for him to be of any service.

Saturday came, and Blueskin's uneasiness increased.

The shades of evening began to creep over the cell, and finally night came.

Still there was no news from Jack.

Neither had he been captured.

Blueskin's brain was busy in wondering what had become of him; but he was unable to account for his absence.

And yet, he told himself, Jack even then might be working in his behalf.

But the long night passed away like the preceding one.

Blueskin slept little.

His thoughts were too busy for slumber to meet his eyelids.

Morning dawned.

It was Sunday.

Soon after breakfast, Blueskin was taken by a strong escort to the chapel.

Mr. Noakes brought up the rear of the procession.

Here Blueskin was compelled to sit, the "cynosure of all eyes."

Besides the inmates of the prison itself, there was, in the galleries round the chapel, a great many spectators, to whom had been extended the privilege of hearing the condemned sermon preached, and seeing the unfortunate man to whom it was addressed.

Blueskin gave one look around him, and then fixed his eyes upon the Ordinary, as the prison chaplain was then called.

Leaning back in his seat, he folded his arms, and in this position he remained until the conclusion of the service.

To what was said, Blueskin paid but little attention.

His thoughts were far differently occupied.

He had begun to give up all hopes of assistance from Jack, and was wondering in what way he could make a second attempt to escape.

This was a very embarrassing and perplexing problem, and one which he could only solve in one way.

That was, to endeavour to win two of the turnkeys who had seemed to be rather friendly disposed towards him over to his interests entirely.

This was a poor hope.

Nevertheless, when night came he made the effort.

He used every argument he could possibly think of, but it was all to no purpose.

The men remained firm.

Then, before he had time to argue the matter thoroughly with them, they were replaced by others.

So he gave over that attempt in despair.

He resumed his old dejected attitude.

The conviction pressed heavily upon his soul that he could do nothing to avert the awful fate which impended over him.

He was perfectly powerless.

He could do nothing but submit to the inexorable course of events.

Something might turn up at the last moment.

Perhaps not.

Perhaps the moments that he was destined to live on earth were so few that he could count them easily.

A strange feeling took possession of him.

He fancied that he felt like one who was about to die.

The strange, creeping sensations and the shuddering chills which every now and then attacked him, he imagined foretold his speedy death.

By morning he had worked himself up to a perfect fever of excitement.

His eyes were sunken and haggard.

His under-lip twitched convulsively.

At an early hour breakfast was brought.

He forced a little food down his throat, but he felt no inclination to eat.

What a strange and horrible feeling it must be to have upon the soul that you are doing everything for the last time!

Blueskin left his breakfast.

"That is the last meal I shall ever eat," he thought.

Then the Ordinary, attired in full canonicals, entered the cell.

He held a prayer-book in his hand, and on his face there was an expression of mock commiseration.

He came close up to Blueskin, and exhorted him to confess.

"You are guilty of the crime for which you have been condemned, and why refuse to confess it?"

"I am innocent," said Blueskin, angrily—"trouble me no further."

"Alas!—alas! Be just, and confess!"

Blueskin turned his back, and ceased to pay any attention to the chaplain and the exhortations he commenced to utter.

"A hardened spirit!" said the Ordinary—"a hardened spirit! The gates of salvation will be eternally closed against you. You are doomed to perish in everlasting fires. Mind that—everlasting fires!"

Then, in a voice audible only to himself, he said:

"Dear me, how hungry I feel! Confound these mornings! they always do interfere with my breakfast!"

He licked his lips as he spoke.

There was now a stir in the corridor without, and Blueskin looked eagerly and anxiously towards the door of his cell to ascertain the cause of it.

A confused throng of persons entered.

CHAPTER CCCXC.

IN WHICH BLUESKIN COMMENCES HIS JOURNEY TO TYBURN.

FOREMOST among the throng, Blueskin noticed the form of Mr. Noakes.

After him came the sheriffs, in their ridiculous official costume.

Then came several of the turnkeys.

Next came a man who carried over his shoulder a hammer, and in his hand a small portable anvil.

That was the blacksmith.

His duty was to remove the fetters from the prisoner, for it was against precedent for a condemned man to ride to Tyburn in irons.

After the blacksmith came another person, who walked with a strange, slouching, lounging gait.

Blueskin felt his gorge rise as he beheld him.

A most sinister countenance did that man possess.

His hair and shaggy beard were red and matted.

His eyes small and piercing like a ferret's, and deeply set in his head.

A diabolical, unmerciful-looking grin distorted his mouth, and displayed to view two rows of yellow, jagged teeth.

His arms were long and sinewy, and his body strangely disproportionate to his legs, for the first was long and the last short.

It was this, perhaps, which gave his legs an inclination to bow outwards, so that, when he stood, his ankle-bones seemed to rest upon the ground.

This man, as the reader will guess, was no other than the public executioner.

But he had claims to being a remarkable character on more grounds than one.

He was known in the prison, and to the world at large, by the name of Jack Ketch.

Why he should have assumed this name—for it afterwards turned out that his name was John Price—no one knew.

Nor can we tell how it was that the word became almost synonymous with executioner.

Certain it is that the hangmen after him—no matter what their names might be—were always called Jack Ketch.

It was Jack Ketch, then, who brought up the rear of the little procession that made its way into Blueskin's cell.

That infamous wretch who shortly afterwards was convicted, on the clearest evidence, of the murder of a woman named White, under circumstances of unparalleled brutality.

He was executed at Bunhill Fields, upon the gallows from which he had suspended so many other persons.

It was a fine lesson to the advocates of capital punishment when this man was accused and convicted of the heinous crime of murder.

It was quite clear that the gallows had not been a lesson to him.

And yet one would think that a hangman was about the last person who would perish in such a manner.

But this is apart from our tale.

We have said that a sensation of utter loathing came over Blueskin when he beheld him.

But some strange kind of fascination prevented him removing his eyes from his person.

In his hands Jack Ketch carried a piece of strong rope, to which he imparted a swinging, snake-like movement.

He fixed his ferret-like eyes upon his victim's countenance.

The rope he carried was to pinion the prisoner with after the irons were removed.

He kept in the background.

Blueskin's attention was distracted from him by one of the sheriffs, who said, in a thick, wheezy voice:

"Well, my man, I hope you have listened to the pious exhortations of the Ordinary, and that what he has said has

had the effect of causing you to repent of your dreadful wickedness! Do you confess?"

"No!"

"No?—not confess? Why not?"

"Because I am perfectly innocent of the crime for which I am condemned to die!"

The sheriff held up his hands in affected or real astonishment.

"Innocent?"

"Yes!"

"Oh! and after being tried and found guilty as you were? Why, you can't be innocent! Well—well! How hardened some people are, to be sure! It quite takes away my breath, that it does! Innocent? Dear me—dear me!"

Blueskin turned his back on the sheriff the moment he found he was not gifted with even ordinary intelligence.

The sheriff addressed himself to the chaplain, and as their discourse quickly suited round to eating and drinking, they got on with each other pretty well.

At a signal from the Governor, the blacksmith now advanced.

He placed his portable anvil close to Blueskin's feet, and set about the task of knocking off his fetters.

This did not take very long to do.

When the operation was over, the blacksmith rose and fell back, in order to make place for his coadjutor, Jack Ketch.

That worthy, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and his fingers playing nervously with the piece of rope he carried, advanced, with the shuffling gait that was peculiar to him, towards the prisoner.

Blueskin shrank back instinctively as this man approached.

Jack Ketch noticed the movement, and chuckled with satisfaction.

The turnkey, however, by whom Blueskin was held would not allow him to retreat far.

When Jack Ketch saw anyone shrink from him with more than usual abhorrence, he always made it a point to handle them a great deal more than was absolutely necessary.

Blueskin sickened when he felt his slimy hands come in contact with his flesh.

But he could not resist.

No tongue nor pen, however, could possibly tell how overjoyed he felt when the pinioning process was over.

Jack Ketch turned round and nodded to the Governor, as much as to say he was ready.

A slight bustle now took place, and then, forming themselves into a kind of procession, the whole party left the cell.

In the courtyard of Newgate there stood the horse and cart which was to convey the prisoner, the hangman, and the Ordinary to Tyburn, which as all our readers may not be aware, was nearly three miles from the prison itself.

In this courtyard, too, were assembled a large body of police officers.

All were mounted, and armed with cutlasses, which they carried over their shoulders in quite a military style.

These were to escort the cart and its occupants to the place of execution, and protect them from any attack that might be made upon them by the mob.

It was by no means an unusual thing for a prisoner to be attempted to be rescued while performing this last journey.

On the present occasion the muster of police officers was unusually strong.

Besides those in the courtyard, there were quite as many more who had taken up their position in the Old Bailey in front of the doors opening into the courtyard.

This was the place, then, towards which the little procession directed their steps.

This, then, was the view which Blueskin beheld upon emerging into the open air.

To him every object, no matter how insignificant, possessed a fearful interest.

He gazed attentively at all.

The first thing that struck him was a confused murmuring noise, for which he could not account.

It sounded like the breaking of the waves upon the sea-shore.

After a moment or so, however, a cry arose, and that made all clear.

The hoarse, murmuring sound came from the throats of the immense multitude assembled in the Old Bailey, and who were impatient for the procession to start.

Having ascertained this, Blueskin looked upon those things which more closely surrounded him.

He glanced at the high stone walls of the prison.

At the bright blue sky overhead.

At the police officers who completely filled the court-yard. But his eyes rested upon the cart.

Across the sides of this a coffin was placed, in what seemed to be a very ostentatious manner.

It was made of very common wood, and had been daubed over with black paint, in order to hide its imperfections.

Or perhaps the maker deluded himself with the idea that it made it look respectable.

This coffin was rude in shape, and had been hastily knocked together by means of some nails, the whitened heads of which showed out in horrible contrast to the black paint on the coffin.

It is no wonder that Blueskin's whole attention was fixed upon this object.

It is not often that a man looks upon his coffin; indeed, it is not possible to look upon one intended for another person without experiencing some emotion.

The coffin was laid across the cart, so that its two ends rested upon the sides.

Blueskin was not allowed much time to contemplate all this.

The officials were all desirous of having the business over as soon as possible.

Accordingly, our hero was hurried towards the cart and compelled to enter it.

He was followed by the Ordinary, who directed him to sit down on the coffin.

He obeyed.

The Ordinary seated himself by his side with the most indifferent air in the world.

He was used to it.

He took a large prayer-book from his pocket.

The hangman now got up into the cart and seated himself at the front part of the vehicle.

Then two police officers, with drawn cutlasses in their hands, took hold of the horse's head.

One stood on each side.

A signal was then given that all was ready.

The signal was heard by the officers outside, and they at once got themselves in readiness.

The door was thrown open.

A roaring cry came from the mob.

The procession started.

Out into the Old Bailey they passed.

The Ordinary began, in a mumbling tone, to read something out of the prayer-book.

But Blueskin paid not the least attention to what he said. He was busily engaged in looking about him.

But he was so surrounded with police officers that he could scarcely catch a glimpse of the crowd.

The mass of people swayed to and fro, each one being anxious to catch a glimpse of the condemned man.

The houses opposite were thronged with people.

They filled every window, and clustered on the house-tops.

All set up a shout as soon as Blueskin came in sight.

The pace at which the cart went was a walking one, so that some time would elapse before they could possibly reach Tyburn.

Blueskin sat with his back to the horse, so that he could only see the way he had come, and not the way he was going.

The top of the Old Bailey was reached, and then the procession turned down Skinner Street.

Just as the cart was going round the corner, Blueskin heard an unnatural and unearthly kind of shriek.

He looked instinctively in the direction from whence it had come.

As he now sat, he had a full view of Newgate Street.

His attention was attracted to the figure of a man who was leaning out of a window in such a manner as to endanger his safety.

This man was gesticulating violently

Then came another shrieking cry.

Blueskin saw the face.

It was Jonathan Wild!

CHAPTER CCCXCI.

JONATHAN WILD GRATIFIES HIMSELF WITH A PEEP AT THE PROCESSION ON ITS WAY TO TYBURN.

Yes, it was indeed Blueskin's old enemy, Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, who had given utterance to the strange, shrieking sound that had had the effect of attracting his attention.

Although the distance from Skinner Street to Jonathan's abode was considerable, yet Blueskin could see plainly enough who it was.

The gesticulations which the thief-taker made were, no doubt, expressive of triumph and gratification.

He was too far off for his words to be audible.

Suddenly, however, he disappeared, and the next moment the cart commenced the steep descent of Snow Hill.

After his insane attempt to dress himself, as recorded in a previous chapter, Jonathan Wild had sunk to the ground in a swoon.

With a sigh, then, Mr. Snoxall came to his assistance.

The worthy apothecary might well feel disheartened, for it seemed labour in vain to try to improve Wild's condition.

However, Mr. Snoxall got him to bed again, and there the thief-taker lay for many hours in a very precarious condition indeed.

His life hung upon the merest thread, and Mr. Snoxall was full of apprehension as to the ultimate result.

But if ever the term "iron constitution" was applicable to any human being, it was to Jonathan Wild.

His powerful physical organisation seemed to bid defiance to all the ills that flesh is heir to.

But this last was a close touch.

As if, however, to bear out the truth of Jack's singular assertion that he was doomed to die by the hangman's rope, Wild grew better.

When the turn once came, his recovery was rapid.

Upon recovery of his consciousness, almost the first thing he desired to know was whether Jack Sheppard had been recaptured.

He was answered in the negative.

Then a perfect volley of curses followed, which ended in a fit of thorough bodily prostration.

When he recovered his senses again a little, which was not for many hours afterwards, he did not seem to take as a lesson the results of his last excitement.

He peremptorily refused to listen to any of Mr. Snoxall's earnest and well-meant remonstrances.

Wild recollected, however, the reply which had been given to his former question, so did not repeat it, but asked another.

That concerned the safety of Blueskin.

To this, of course, a highly satisfactory answer was given, and the thief-taker felt more content.

He felt that he should be well the moment that he received the intelligence of Jack's arrest.

"What is to-day?" he asked presently.

"Sunday," replied the apothecary.

A dim light only came through the window of the bedroom, and Jonathan did not know whether the day was just about to commence, or whether it had reached its termination; so he said:

"Morning or evening?"

"Evening, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan laughed discordantly.

"Ha, ha!" he said—"why, all is well! To-morrow is hanging-day—ha, ha! I shall not be able to go to Tyburn—that is indeed a bitter disappointment! But I will see the procession—yes, yes—no one shall hinder me from seeing that!"

And he was as good as his word.

Jonathan never closed his eyes during all the long hours of the night.

He kept wide awake, for he was afraid that if he did drop off to sleep Mr. Snoxall would not wake him up to see the procession on its way to Tyburn.

And so he waited for morning.

It came at length, and he watched the first rays of early dawn stream into his room with scarcely conceivable satisfaction.

He listened every time the clock of St. Sepulchre's Church struck the hours, and at last, when eight o'clock came, he would insist upon dressing himself.

Mr. Snoxall did not even attempt to remonstrate.

The determined manner of the thief-taker too plainly proved that it would be unavailing.

It was almost too much for Jonathan, but at last he finished dressing himself.

Then he was so utterly exhausted that he was compelled to lie down on the bed for a little while, in order to regain his strength.

Then nine o'clock struck.

The procession would start in another hour—perhaps less.

Wild closed his eyes, and endeavoured to call before his mind just what was taking place inside Newgate.

It galled him exceedingly to think that he could not be a spectator of the scene.

He felt that it would have done his heart good.

With a weary sigh he turned over on the bed, and shortly afterwards half-past nine was chimed from the church steeple.

He resolved to place himself at the window at once.

From the position occupied by Wild's house in Newgate Street, all the windows in the front commanded a view of the top of the Old Bailey and Skinner Street, with Fleet Market and Holborn Hill in the distance.

Jonathan's bedroom was situated on the third floor, and from this very elevated situation a capital view was obtainable.

Throwing back the lattice till it lay flat against the wall, Jonathan seated himself upon the window-sill in such a manner that he commanded a full prospect in the wished-for direction.

With a demoniac grin distorting his countenance, he sat there, patiently waiting for the procession to make its appearance.

"I would give ten years of my life," he said, "if I could only accompany the procession to Tyburn and see the sentence fully and properly carried out."

But even as these words passed his lips, such a fearful sensation of weakness came over him, that he could scarcely for a moment or two retain his balance, and he was in imminent danger of falling out of window.

He recovered himself, however, and then he gasped:

"No, no, I must not think of such a thing; it is altogether impossible! This accursed weakness is completely master of me—completely; and for awhile I must succumb. Ah! what is that?"

St. Sepulchre's bell began to toll with a regular and dismal sound.

"The procession has started," said Wild, excitement lending him for a moment a fresh accession of energy. "Now, then, to feast my eyes upon the pleasantest spectacle I have seen for a long, long time! I must not miss anything! I must observe all—all!"

As Jonathan spoke these words, he leaned out of the window to such an extent that it seemed as though he must fall out.

And certainly, if at this moment another fit of weakness had seized upon him, nothing could have saved him from falling headlong into the street.

But Jonathan Wild thought not of this hideous danger.

His faculties were all bound up in and directed to one object.

By the commotion at the top of the Old Bailey, he could tell the procession was close at hand.

The mob was on the move, and was going steadily in one direction.

That was down Skinner Street.

Then the mounted police officers who headed the procession, and whose duty it was to force a way through the mass of people for the remainder to follow, appeared in sight.

And so they slowly went on until at last the cart appeared before Wild's view.

For a moment he gazed upon it like one spell-bound.

He could see Blueskin plainly enough, for really he was not so very far off after all, and Wild had the advantage of his position.

He gloated over the idea that one of his most troublesome opponents was on the high-road to a place where his troubles would be put an end to.

But Jonathan was not content simply with seeing Blueskin.

He wanted Blueskin to see him.

He wanted his victim to be aware that he was not so

very bad after all, and that at all events he was well enough to exult over his situation.

It was clear, however, that unless he could do something that would attract the prisoner's attention, he would pass by without seeing him, for Blueskin's eyes were turned in quite another direction.

It was for the reason of attracting the prisoner's attention to his presence at the window that Wild gave utterance to that horrible shriek which rose high above the confused murmur in the street below.

As he fully expected, Blueskin looked up.

Then, in order that there should be no mistake, he waved his arms violently, and this at once had the effect of causing Blueskin to see his foe.

When he was sure that the prisoner's eyes were bent upon him—that, indeed, a recognition had taken place—Wild uttered a second cry more horrible than the first.

That was intended to express how he enjoyed his triumph—how he exulted over the position of his enemy, who he now fancied he had crushed for ever.

Whether the cry had this significance in the case of the person for whom it was intended is more than we can say.

But the excitement which had imparted so much fictitious strength to Jonathan Wild suddenly departed and left him powerless.

He had no more strength than an infant.

It was lucky for him that at this moment Mr. Snoxall happened to be near him.

The apothecary watched all Jonathan's motions closely, and when he uttered the second shriek, he seized hold of him and his apparel, for he really feared that he would fall into the street.

And such an accident would very probably have occurred, for directly afterwards, Wild felt all his strength go from him.

Mr. Snoxall dragged him into the room.

This was how it was, then, that Jonathan Wild disappeared so suddenly and so strangely from Blueskin's gaze.

The thief-taker was certainly not going the right way to get well.

But he was once more placed in his bed and left to recover his consciousness, for Mr. Snoxall had lost all patience.

A cold shudder came over Blueskin when his eyes met those of his implacable foe.

He wondered whether he had really seen him for the last time in this world.

He looked around him at the different familiar objects that he passed, and made the same reflection.

It must be understood that Blueskin had not altogether lost hope.

He could not banish the idea that even yet Jack Sheppard would do something on his behalf.

"By this time surely he must know of my perilous situation," muttered Blueskin.

But he could see nothing unusual.

The people accompanied and followed the cart in vast numbers.

They uttered loud shouts now and then, and an incessant roar came from them, but there was nothing in the shape of a demonstration.

On the contrary, they were unusually quiet and orderly.

When any notorious criminal was taken to the scaffold, it was usual for the mob to howl and groan, and pelt the inmates of the cart with such missiles as came most readily to hand.

Nothing of the kind was now attempted.

It seemed as though Blueskin possessed the suffrage of the mob, and that they heartily pitied his position.

But, be this as it may, the procession was allowed to make its way towards Tyburn without any hindrance whatever.

CHAPTER CCCXCII.

SHOWS WHAT TOOK PLACE AT TYBURN WHEN BLUESKIN AND THE OFFICERS ARRIVED THERE.

In the good old times, as they are facetiously called, it was customary for the procession to come to a halt when half-way on the road to Tyburn.

From time immemorial it had been the custom for this halt to be made, though no one could tell the precise origin of it.

Of course they stopped before a public-house.

This inn was situated in High Street, St. Giles's, not far from the old church, past which they had to go to reach the Oxford Road, for New Oxford Street, which reaches from the corner of Tottenham Court Road to High Holborn, was not then in existence.

At this public-house it was usual for the officers to be supplied with refreshments.

The other functionaries, too, were similarly attended to.

It was also the custom for the landlord of the public-house to present a bowl of ale to the criminal.

None of these ceremonies were omitted on the present occasion.

Blueskin was thirsty and jaded, and he drank eagerly of the proffered draught, and thanked the landlord for his attention.

After a delay of perhaps a quarter of an hour, the procession resumed its progress.

Blueskin saw the cavalcade set in motion again with a feeling of disappointment at his heart.

The only service that he thought Jack could render to him would be to rescue him by main force.

Had he contemplated such a thing, what better place than this could he have selected for the purpose?

Surely, if the attempt was to have been made at all, it should be here.

But no!

The procession resumed its way without even the shadow of a disturbance.

Blueskin felt his countenance change.

The hope with which he had buoyed himself up was sinking within him.

He began to think that after all he should not be able to escape the fate designed for him.

He began to think that the sun was shining upon him for the last time.

The procession turned the corner of the Oxford Road.

At the time of which we write, Oxford Street was merely a broad country road; and now Blueskin could see fields and trees, and gardens and hedges.

On came the mob, rushing and surging like the sea, but still orderly and quiet.

The Governor of Newgate rode close to the cart, darting from time to time looks of triumph and hatred upon the doomed man.

Of this, Blueskin appeared to take no notice.

Mr. Noakes never enjoyed a ride so much in all his life.

More and more downcast did Blueskin become.

It seemed that as Tyburn approached hope receded.

He resigned himself to the worst.

Yet, to his credit be it said, not even a thought derogatory to Jack Sheppard entered his mind.

He never once accused him of wilfully abandoning him to his fate.

Suddenly, however, a tumultuous cry from somewhere in advance struck upon Blueskin's ear.

His heart beat quickly.

Was it the rescue?

The cry was repeated; but he could not help thinking that it sounded more like a cry of surprise than aught else.

Blueskin was unable to see what was going on in advance, but he fixed his eyes on the Governor under the impression that he should be able to gather something from the expression of his countenance.

He saw him start with surprise and look eagerly and keenly before him.

Then an ejaculation came from his lips, and he rode towards the carriage in which the sheriffs were seated.

He said something, and then the sheriff bobbed his head out of the window of the coach.

Notwithstanding this, the procession continued on its way, though it was clear something peculiar had taken place.

The people still kept up the tumultuous shout.

Slowly the cart rolled its way onwards.

At each step the riot grew more and more prodigious.

Blueskin fancied naturally enough that the uproar in some way concerned him, and he felt anxious to a degree to know what it meant.

He turned his head and looked as well as he could, but he could see nothing.

The Ordinary, however, stood up in the cart.

"God bless me!" he ejaculated, as he settled his spectacles on his nose to be sure that he saw rightly.

"What has happened, reverend sir?" asked Blueskin.

"Happened?—why—why—why—the gallows has disappeared! Where's it gone to? What does it all mean?" Blueskin started violently.

"At last!" he muttered—"at last!"

He fancied he could detect Jack's agency in all this.

At this moment the cart stopped.

Blueskin looked around him.

There was certainly no gallows to be seen, though he could tell well enough that they had reached the spot where it ought to stand.

A very animated discussion appeared to be going on between the Governor and the sheriffs.

The fact was, they were not a little puzzled as to what they should do.

To carry out the sentence of the law seemed an impossibility, and yet they did not know what to do about taking the prisoner back to Newgate again.

And now a cry of a different character came from the mob.

Upon hearing it, the police-officers formed a circle round the cart, so as to protect it should any attack be made.

We must now go back for a moment to Jack Sheppard, and relate his proceedings.

After accomplishing his object of cutting down Tyburn Tree, he very industriously set to work to render his recognition a matter of difficulty.

He had already taken some steps with this end in view, and he now proceeded to render what he had already done in the way of disguise more effectual.

He plentifully besmeared his face and hands with mud, and so altered his countenance as to defy identification.

His slim, agile figure he could not alter; but he stooped, and made it appear as though he had a hump on his back.

This done, he retired to a distance, and fixed his eyes upon the heap of wood which was all that remained of Tyburn Tree.

Had he possessed the means of procuring a light, he would assuredly have set fire to the wood, and made a glorious bonfire of the whole.

He waited here until in the distance he saw the throng of persons approaching.

At last they reached the heap of wood, and then Jack joined their numbers.

As one amongst so many he was not noticed, and he reasonably anticipated that the attention of the mob would be directed to the heap of wood, and not to him.

It was in consequence of this discovery that the mob had uttered the cry which sounded to Blueskin like one of surprise.

Then the procession arrived, and halted at the usual spot.

The dismay of the officials may be imagined when they discovered what had taken place.

Such a thing had never happened before, so they had no precedent to guide them.

A very animated discussion ensued in consequence.

Of this delay—or rather suspension of execution—Jack thought he should be able to take advantage.

He was no stranger to the peculiarities of an English mob.

He knew well that they were capable of being swayed with the utmost ease in any direction.

They had assembled with the avowed intention of witnessing the execution of Blueskin.

Now, however, it was impossible that the sentence could be carried into effect.

It was only natural they should desire to do something.

Of all this had Jack thought, and, in addition, he remembered that it is a peculiarity of the English disposition generally to delight in setting authorities at defiance.

If any proof is wanted of this, it is only necessary to think of the various outbreaks and insurrections which have taken place.

The leading object, and very often the professed intention, was to overturn the power by which they were governed.

And then there was not only this, but there was the strong antagonism which has existed, and which we

suppose always will exist, between the populace and the police.

Upon all these various and discursive reflections, which he had plenty of time to make, Jack Sheppard founded the hope that he should be able to create an influence upon the mob which would prove beneficial to his comrade, Blueskin.

How far he was right in his calculations, and how far he succeeded, we shall quickly see.

Mingling with the throng, Jack waited until the authorities were in the midst of their discussion.

Then turning to those who were nearest to him, he addressed them in a peculiar tone of voice.

He suggested what good fun it would be, now that the gallows was cut down, if someone would overthrow the police and the cart and all, and set the prisoner at liberty, who it would be a shame to bring out for execution a second time.

The casual words which Jack dropped, all of them having the above tendency, made an immediate impression on the people, and the words spread like wildfire.

All seemed to think that a collision with the authorities would be something specially delightful.

Moreover, Blueskin was rather a favourite than otherwise with the people at large.

Jack Sheppard watched with the most intense anxiety the effect which his words produced.

He saw that they were taken favourably, and his heart beat high with hope.

In a few moments he felt confident that the mob was ripe and ready for action.

If left to themselves, however, they would probably do nothing: they required something to give them an impulse in the required direction.

That impulse Jack now attempted to give.

"Down with the cart!" he shouted. "Down with the cart! Let us all make a rush, and over it will go!"

These words were responded to with a shout of delight, which showed how much the plan of action was in accordance with their wishes.

It was this shout which had inspired Blueskin with hope, and which had caused the officers to range themselves round the cart.

However, the people made a rush.

The officers saw them coming, and endeavoured to present a firm front and stand their ground.

But it was a vain effort.

They might just as well have tried to prevent the progress of the ocean.

On came the living mass with irresistible power.

A general movement was communicated to the whole of the vast body, and the result of such a combination of strength was really extraordinary.

The officers were swept down, their ranks broken, and finally the cart was overthrown.

The mob was now out of all control.

Jack Sheppard forced his way towards the cart.

He reached it at an opportune moment.

He raised Blueskin in his grasp, and prevented him from being trampled underfoot, as he otherwise would have been.

"Good friends," cried Sheppard, "here is Blueskin—let him escape!"

The settling mass of people divided, and showed a clear passage through.

"A knife—a knife!" cried Jack, "a knife to cut his bonds!"

One was handed to him immediately, and one stroke was sufficient to sever the cords by which Blueskin was bound.

"Hurrah!" cried Jack.

He was responded to by a loud cheer from the vast throng.

CHAPTER CCCXCIII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN FLY FOR THEIR LIVES, AND MEET WITH A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

THE living lane which was opened for Blueskin and Jack Sheppard to pass through closed up behind them immediately.

In a few moments both fugitives were clear of the mob.

They looked back, and could see that the contest was going on with full vigour.

Of this state of things it was highly necessary that they should take the utmost advantage.

Accordingly, after speaking a word or two to each other, both started off at a rapid pace.

They took the direction of the open country.

If the people could only keep the officers busily engaged for a little time, they would, beyond all doubt, be able to get clean off.

They made the best use of their limbs that they possibly could.

In the distance they could see a clump of trees, and towards this they directed their steps, being aware of the importance of getting out of sight of their pursuers.

This clump of trees—for such at first it appeared to be—was a long way off; and as they drew nearer, they found it very rapidly increase in size.

In fact, it expanded itself into quite a little wood.

They glanced back from time to time, but could not perceive that they were yet pursued.

This circumstance, however, did not cause them to slacken their speed; on the contrary, it induced them to strain every nerve to the utmost.

At length the welcome shelter of the trees was gained; and then—and not till then—did Jack Sheppard and Blueskin pause to recover their spent breath, and to wipe the perspiration from their faces.

"So far, then, all is well!" gasped Jack. "But come, we must not pause. On—on! We are too near our foes to be safe. On—on!"

"All right, Jack!" exclaimed Blueskin. "You are a brave fellow! I thought you would not desert me, though I confess I lost heart when we left St. Giles's behind."

"Forward—forward!" said Jack. "Spare your breath, my friend, until a better opportunity."

"Hallo!" said a gruff voice at this moment. "Who are you, and where are you going to?"

These words were uttered by a tall, brawny man, dressed like a labourer, who planted himself exactly in the way of our friends.

"Stand aside!" cried Jack. "We have no leisure to answer questions. Stand aside, I say, or it may be the worse for you!"

"Now, now—don't you be so fast, young 'un!" said this man, doggedly. "Don't be so fast! If you turn out to be who I take you for, you will bless your stars you run agin me—that's all I've got to say!"

The man's manner was most certainly not unfriendly. Jack knew not what to think, and paused irresolutely.

"There was to have been a bit of a lagging match down there—wasn't there?" said the man, pointing in the direction of Tyburn—"only there's been a bit of a scrimmage, and the party's got off!"

"What of that?"

"Why, I have been on the look-out, and saw what took place," said the man; "and I saw you two coming, so I said to myself, 'Then it's the party what was to have been scragged, and here an' I, Ned Cantle, ready to help them;' so by that I came towards you."

The tones in which this man spoke made our friends think he was sincere, and Jack said:

"If you are disposed to befriend us, we shall be very thankful. This is Blueskin! He was to have been executed, but he escaped at the eleventh hour!"

The man nodded.

"We want to find some place where we can hide from the pursuit which the officers will make after us."

"Exactly; I knowed it!" said the singular individual who had called himself by the no less singular name of Ned Cantle—"I knowed it! Just you follow me, and I will show you where the officers will never find you!"

"But why are you so anxious to do us such a service?" asked Blueskin.

"Well, if you must know, the blessed officers is my enemies, and I look upon anybody else as the officers is enemies to as friends of mine. Now, to show you I mean the square thing, I will just tell you this: Me and my pals we've got a comfortable place in this here wood, into which we retire ourselves—when circumstances render it necessary! We go out o' nights on our own account."

"Then we are brothers of the quill!" interrupted Jack Sheppard.

"In course we are! and seeing you in such a predicament as this here present, why I felt I could do no more nor no less than render you what service I could!"

"We are obliged to you," said Blueskin, "and if you will find us a place of concealment, you shall receive from us some more substantial proof of our gratitude than mere thanks."

"Oh, blow that! Come on, or it may be you'll be too late!"

Ned Cantle turned on his heel and plunged into the wood, leaving our friends to follow him.

They did so with mingled hope and fear.

They were afraid the man would prove treacherous, and yet he spoke fair enough.

He might be sincere, and if so, the meeting would be lucky for them; and as for the other, they resolved to keep a sharp eye upon all his movements.

In an unconcerned manner Ned Cantle threaded his way through the wood, and presently paused on a small open space, in the centre of which a large oak tree grew.

"Now, here we are!" he said. "I am a-going to show you one of the best hiding-places in the world, and where your foes will never find you! Just observe my motions!"

Our friends did not need this invitation, for they watched every movement with the greatest attention.

But in a few minutes their suspicions vanished and gave way to emotions of astonishment.

Ned Cantle walked right up to the large oak tree of which we have spoken, and seized a branch which was quite destitute of leaves, and which grew out in a very peculiar way in a horizontal direction.

This branch Ned Cantle seized firmly with both hands, and then hung upon with all his weight.

The result which ensued from this proceeding was very singular indeed.

The trunk of the tree lost its perpendicular position.

Ned Cantle pulled more and more, until the tree assumed an angle of about forty-five degrees.

Observing the astonishment that was depicted upon the countenances of Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, he said:

"There now, that's what I call a neat contrivance. You see that branch I caught hold of acts as a lever, and also as a support to prevent the trunk from going down too far. Then you see just by the root a hinge is fixed to one side of the trunk, and the roots are cut on the other, so that it lifts up in the way you see, and covers the entrance to our cavern."

Our friends were quite lost in admiration.

"But come, come!" said Ned Cantle. "You must look more closely at this here beautiful contrivance another time. You must not linger now. In with you, and I'll follow!"

As he spoke these words, he pointed to a small aperture in the earth, which the removal of the tree had disclosed.

Jack and Blueskin looked dubiously at each other for a moment, and then, banishing their suspicions, they lowered their bodies through the hole, which was just large enough for the purpose.

Ned Cantle prepared to follow them.

Our friends found themselves on a rude kind of staircase, which seemed to have been cut out of the solid earth.

They stood aside, and the next moment their singular companion joined them.

Jack and Blueskin were both curious to know how he would restore the tree to its original position, and they were not long kept in suspense as to the means employed.

Ned Cantle produced a long piece of wood, which looked very much like a boat-hook, only its length was much greater.

This he projected upwards, and placed the hook in a staple that was fixed in the bottom of the tree.

Then, exerting all his strength, he pulled down.

The tree followed, and reached its proper position with a dull thump.

They were now in profound darkness.

"Remain where you are for a moment!" said Ned Cantle—"I know all the ins and outs of the place, but you don't. Wait a moment, and I will fetch a light!"

Our friends had no other resource than to obey.

But they had to a great extent lost the suspicions which they had first entertained as to Ned Cantle's good faith.

They could not conceive why he had behaved as he had if it was his intention to betray them.

He seemed, however, to be a long while absent, and our friends grew anxious and uneasy.

In a little while, however, they saw the bright gleam of a light, and then they discerned the form of their new and strange companion.

He was carrying a faggot, which was burning brightly at one end, and which served admirably for a torch.

"I've been a long while," he said, "but the fire was almost out. It's all right now, however! Follow me carefully down the steps, and mind you don't slip!"

This last caution was by no means an unnecessary one, for the steps only being cut out of the clayey soil, were very slippery.

However, the bottom was reached in safety, and then, after going a few yards along a passage, the little party emerged into a tolerable-sized cavern.

In one corner a fire was burning, and in the centre was a rude table, round which still ruder seats were placed.

But the cave did not appear to contain any other living inhabitant besides themselves.

"There's none of the chickens at home just at present!" said Ned Cattle. "They all went off to the scragging match, leaving me to take care of the premises."

"I suppose the chickens are your companions?"

"They is," returned Ned Cattle; "and I suppose you is Jack Sheppard?"

"You might be further off the mark!"

"Then tip us your charley, old fellow! I am glad I have been able to do you a service—and you too, Blueskin!"

"I am much obliged to you!" said Blueskin. "You have indeed done us a service, and a very important one too! Until we saw you, it was very doubtful whether we should escape, but I don't think the officers will be cunning enough to find out this snug little crib!"

"In course they won't, and here you can remain as long as you think proper! We shall be glad of your company!"

"Thanks! thanks!"

"I dare say you are curious to know who I am," said Ned Cattle, and why I am inclined to stand your friend?"

"We are curious upon that point."

"Well, then, I'll tell you. In the first place, you will understand that there's six of us."

"Chickens?"

"Yes! Well, whenever it is necessary, we take up our quarters here, and when we go out, we pick up our livings in the best manner we are able."

Blueskin nodded.

"I quite understand" he said, "and I suppose your comrades set out for Tyburn, in the hope of picking up something?"

"Just so! Of course we had all heard of you and Jack Sheppard too, and we knew that this morning was fixed for your tucking up! We wished all of us that we could save you. I had to stop to look after the place, as I told you. However, I climbed a tree and had a look out, and then I saw the gallows was gone, and that there was a regular scrimmage going on!"

"Well?"

"And after that, I saw you running this way, and I guessed who you were in a moment."

"And so you came down and met us?"

"That's it."

"Then we are much obliged to you!"

"It's all right, and we shall all be pleased if you will join our band, and take the lead in it."

CHAPTER CCCXCIV.

JACK SHEPPARD PAYS HIS PROMISED VISIT TO SIR JAMES THORNHILL, AND CAUSES A "SENSATION" AMONG HIS GUESTS.

"We will talk about that another time, when more of your companions are present," replied Blueskin.

"What's that?" said Jack.

A peculiar, clattering noise fell upon his ear, and caused him to ask this question.

"It's all right!" said Ned Cattle. "Don't alarm yourself, I beg."

"What is it?"

"Some of the chickens have returned."

"And that clattering noise is a signal that they desire admission?"

"Just so."

"But stay!" cried Blueskin, as Ned Cattle was about to leave the cavern. "Are you going to let them in?"

"Of course I am!"

"But it will be dangerous! There are our foes, you know!"

"All right—all right! You may depend the chickens wouldn't come near this here blessed place if there was any officers about! It's all right, and when they come in we shall be able to learn further information."

With this assurance our friends were compelled to be satisfied.

Ned Cattle left them, and in a few minutes returned with two men, whose exterior appearance was very similar to his own.

By their manner, it was quite clear that Ned Cattle had informed them who were in the cave.

They treated Jack and Blueskin with a respect, which it was easy enough to see was not feigned.

In their rough way, they bid them a hearty welcome.

"There's a hottish searching made, I can tell you!" said one of the new-comers. "But don't be alarmed; they will never find you here, if they search till doomsday!"

"I am glad of that assurance!" said Blueskin. "You are certain you were not seen to enter?"

"Oh, quite!"

"That's all right, then!"

Some time elapsed, during which Blueskin and Jack Sheppard got upon very friendly terms with the men who made that cave their hiding and abiding place.

At length more came, until the whole band was assembled.

Everyone seemed to treat our two friends with great consideration, and they evidently thought it no mean honour to have among them two such celebrated characters.

In this underground region, they heard nothing of the officers, to whom the sudden disappearance of Blueskin must have been mysterious in the extreme.

As soon as they possibly could, our friends took the opportunity to withdraw to a corner, where they rapidly talked over their affairs.

This conversation, however, it is unnecessary for us to place before the reader.

Blueskin and Jack did no more than inform each other what had individually happened to them since their sudden, forced parting in the mysterious house in Spring Gardens.

Jack learned, with grief and dismay, that Blueskin was ignorant of the whereabouts of Edgeworth Bess.

He told Blueskin, however, what Jonathan Wild had stated to him respecting her.

This, and an attentive consideration of the whole affair from first to last, forced them to the conclusion that Edgeworth Bess must once more be an inmate of Jonathan Wild's house.

"How unfortunate it is!" said Jack Sheppard, with vexation—"we are now in a worse position than ever to render her any assistance, and you may depend she stands in very great need of help!"

"She does—she does!" replied Blueskin. "For some time, though, I fancy Jonathan Wild will not be in a position to do much harm, if he has ever so much inclination. Had he not been born to be hanged, the wound which I inflicted upon him would have been a mortal one."

Jack Sheppard uttered a curse.

"We must wait a few days," he said, "and then see what can be done. We were uncommonly fortunate in finding such a place of refuge as this. I fancy we are quite safe."

"So do I."

"However, Blueskin, as soon as night comes, I shall set out."

"Do what?"

"Set out."

"Are you mad?"

"Not a bit of it."

"But you must be!"

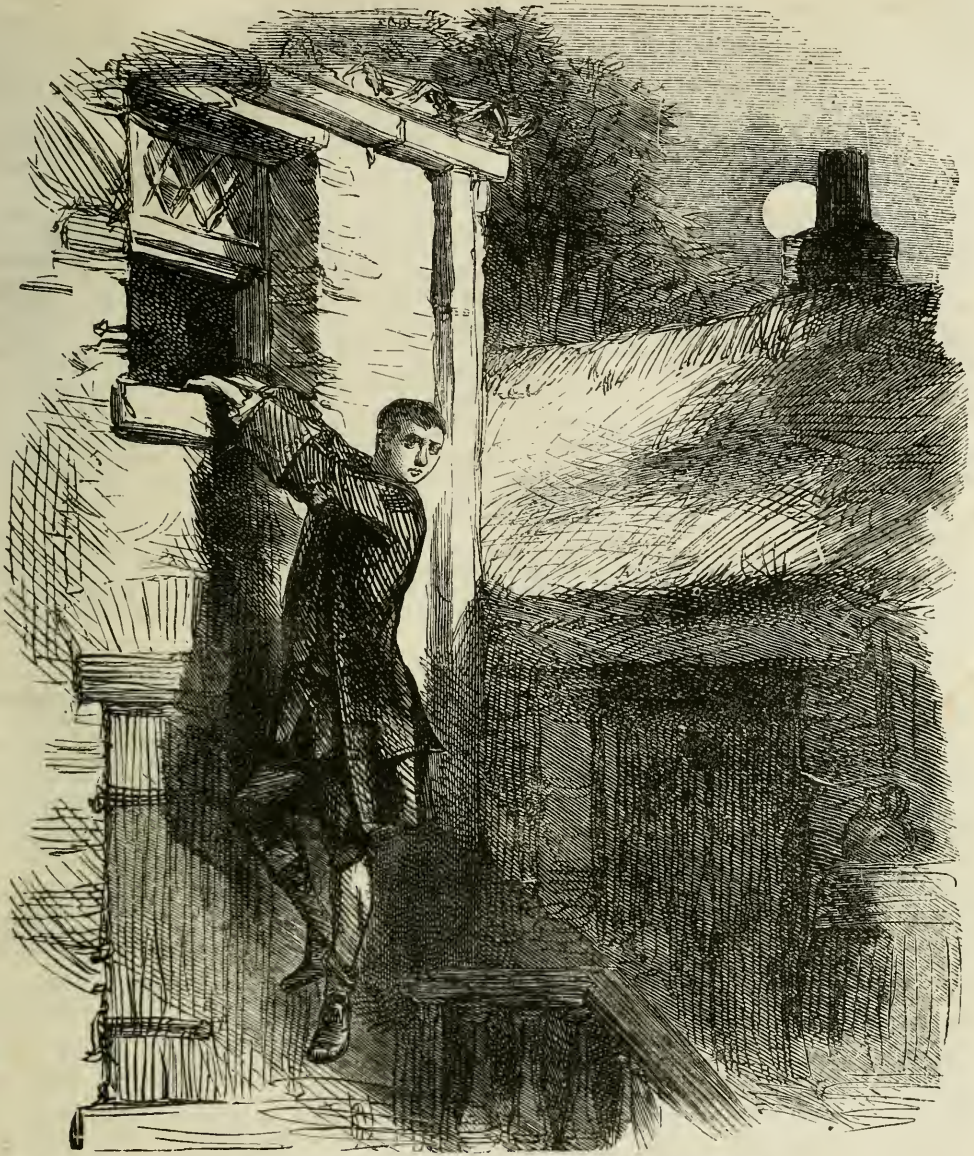
"Why?"

"To dream of a such a thing."

"Pho, pho! You cannot have forgotten what I told you about Sir James Thornhill?"

"But you will not be so foolhardy under the circumstances as to keep your word?"

"I intend to try."



JACK SHEPPARD ESCAPES FROM THE PUBLIC HOUSE IN RUPERT STREET.

"Nay, nay—be persuaded by me! This is utter folly."
 "I differ from you—differ from you entirely! Sir James Thornhill is a gentleman."

"He may be."

"And I am sure I have nothing to fear from him."

"That is not the point! On your way to his house, or else on your return from it, you will be most certainly apprehended!"

"I will take care that does not happen."

"Then, if you go, let me accompany you."

"I cannot do so, for such a proceeding would have no other effect than to double the danger. I cannot consent to that. While I am gone, do you remain here, and think over our future proceedings. It may be that I shall return with important information, which will guide us as to our future proceedings."

"Well, well, Jack, since you are so determined to go, I suppose you must do so. I cannot detain you. But be careful!"

"That advice is not needed," said Jack.

No. 82.—BLUESKIN.

By the time our friends had ended this conversation, they found, upon appealing to Ned Cantle upon the subject, that night had fairly come.

Accordingly, Jack signified his wish to leave the cave, and was permitted to do so.

Once more, then, he stood beneath the canopy of heaven—about to set out on an expedition of the utmost danger.

To enter London so soon after what had occurred seemed to be an act of utter madness.

There was everything to lose, and very little to gain, by such an enterprise.

But Jack had signified to Sir James Thornhill his intention of paying him a visit, and he determined that, were the risk ten thousand times greater than it was, he would prove to him that his words were not a mere empty boast.

Besides this, Jack was really anxious to see his portrait.

Not without a due and proper amount of caution, Jack

made his way out of the little wood in which the robbers' cave was situated.

He looked around him as well as the darkness would permit, but he could see nothing whatever of his foes.

Encouraged by this, he proceeded with more confidence, taking his way to London by a rather circuitous route.

The night was rather dark and blustering, and of a sufficiently disagreeable character to keep all those persons indoors whose business did not compel to be out.

This was a state of things that Jack by no means found fault with.

Sir James Thornhill's residence was situated in the Bird-cage Walk, St. James's Park, at the time whereof we write, a much more fashionable locality than it is at the present day.

This spot Jack knew he could approach without passing through any populous, well-thronged thoroughfare.

The distance he had to go was, however, considerable, and he made it still further by the circuitous manner in which he approached his destination.

He had agreed to call to see the portrait some time between sunset and midnight.

It was now much nearer the latter than the former.

Leaving Jack on his way, however, we will precede him to his destination.

Sir James Thornhill's mansion was one blaze of light.

The very exterior was sufficient to inform the most casual passer-by that something of an unusual character was taking place within.

The fact was, the great painter had given a dinner that evening, and a large number of guests had assembled.

It is, however, to one particular room in his mansion that we wish to direct the reader's attention.

It was a spacious chamber, and brilliantly lighted by a chandelier which depended from the ceiling.

Seated round the table in this room were several of Sir James Thornhill's guests.

The table was covered with wines of the choicest vintage, to which the guests paid their respects freely.

No females were present.

Sir James Thornhill was seated at the head of the table, and speaking in a rather serious tone of voice.

"He is a very singular young man," he said—"a very singular young man, indeed, and I should not at all wonder if he is as good as his word."

The guests laughed and shook their heads.

"No, no!" said one who sat next to Sir James, and who was easily distinguished from the rest by his wearing spectacles. "We can believe a great deal about Jack Sheppard, but not that. You may depend it was a mere idle boast."

"Oh, certainly—certainly," said another. "Though I must confess I feel a very great curiosity to see this fellow, who has done such wonderful things, but I am afraid there will be no such luck."

"Well, gentlemen, we shall see!" remarked Sir James Thornhill. "When he first spoke I must confess I ridiculed the idea, but he spoke in such an earnest, confident tone that I altered my mind."

"He has performed a portion of his promise at any rate!" said the young man with spectacles.

"He has! Who would have thought it possible he could have escaped from Newgate? I know, for a fact, that every possible precaution was taken to guard against such an occurrence!"

"He must have had assistance!"

"I don't believe it! With regard to his keeping his engagement, however, it seems to me that he has got over the principal obstacle, and I am in expectation of his making his appearance every moment."

"I fear you will be disappointed."

"I have little fear of it myself," said Sir James. "No one knows of his intention save myself and my apprentice Hogarth, and I am quite certain there is no one here who would betray him!"

"No—no—no!" said all the guests, in chorus.

"Then, rely upon it, he will come."

"But do you really think that, in order to keep his word, and perhaps to satisfy some curiosity he may feel about seeing his portrait, he will run the frightful risk of venturing through London streets?"

"I do, indeed!"

"After what occurred this morning?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Well, if he does come, I shall confess him to be the boldest and most desperate character that ever existed!"

"We shall see before long!" said Sir James Thornhill. "I have given instructions to the servants that if anyone calls, and inquires for me, immediate admission is to be granted to the person so inquiring."

"Then, that will be no obstacle?"

"None whatever! I must admit that at first I was very doubtful whether he would come, but that was because I saw how securely he was confined in Newgate."

"And he has broken out?"

"He has, which seems to me incredible. However, in my opinion, the most difficult part of his enterprise is over, and, having done so much, he will consider the rest comparatively easy."

"Well, it may be so," Sir James—"it may be so! and I, for one, do not hesitate to say that I feel very much obliged to you for having invited us to your house on the present occasion. I only hope we shall not be disappointed in seeing him, but I must confess I have my doubts!"

"Patience, gentlemen—patience! His agreement with me was that he would call on Monday evening some time between sunset and midnight!"

"Then all I can say is, Sir James," said another of the guests, as he took a magnificent chronometer from his pocket, "that if Jack Sheppard is to keep his word, he will have to make good speed, for it is now on the very stroke of midnight!"

"Then I am punctual to the moment!" said a voice, which Sir James Thornhill instantly recognised as being that of Jack Sheppard. "I am very sorry, gentlemen, that I could not come before, but I had no idea so many distinguished persons were awaiting my arrival!"

CHAPTER CCCXCV.

JACK SHEPPARD HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF HIS LIFE THROUGH THE TREACHERY OF THE NEGRO.

UPON hearing the words with which the last chapter concluded, Sir James Thornhill and his guests, with one accord, turned their faces towards the door, for it was from this direction that the voice they had heard proceeded.

The young man in the spectacles, who had expressed his belief that Jack Sheppard would not appear, fairly rose to his feet with curiosity and surprise, while Sir James himself turned half round in his chair.

There was now no longer any doubt about the matter.

Just within the doorway, standing in the attitude of half confidence, half diffidence, stood the daring prison-breaker, Jack Sheppard, with whose daring exploits all London was then ringing.

"Come in!" said Sir James Thornhill, "and close the door after you. You have nothing to fear. These gentlemen present you have nothing to apprehend from."

"I will take your word without any hesitation," said Jack, as he closed the door behind him as desired.

"Come here, then," said Sir James; "sit down; you shall see your portrait presently."

Jack seated himself in the chair to which Sir James Thornhill pointed, though he felt awkward and uncomfortable.

As for the guests, their curiosity to see Jack Sheppard was so great that they gladly enough permitted him to have a place at the table beside them, because they would then have better opportunity of observing his personal appearance.

The amount of interest which was felt in Jack Sheppard at this period is really inconceivable, but a reference to the public prints of the time will show the lengths that people went in order to have a peep at him, and his fame was greatly enhanced by his last exploit.

Some choice wine was poured out and placed before Jack, who drank it freely enough, and in a little time he felt a considerable portion of his awkwardness wear off.

As may be expected, Sir James Thornhill's guests asked him many questions with regard to his past proceedings.

As the reader, however, is in full possession of all that has taken place, there is no need for us to place these questions at full length before him.

To nearly all these questions Jack returned truthful and straightforward replies; to several, however, he replied evasively.

On the whole, they could not help being pleased with their strange guest.

As for Jack himself, he soon grew tired of this scene, and heartily wished it at an end.

For a long time, however, he hesitated to say anything respecting it, but at length he summoned courage to speak.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I feel very much obliged to you for the kind reception you have given me. You will, however, excuse me for mentioning that I live, as it were, in an atmosphere of danger, and that if I stay here long I shall run a very great risk of being captured on my way back to my place of refuge. In a short time, now, the dawn will come."

"You are quite right," said Sir James Thornhill, "and we ought not to have required a reminder from you upon the subject. We will not detain you a moment longer."

The painter rose as he spoke.

This example was followed by Jack and the remainder of the guests.

"You must not forget the occasion of your visit," continued Sir James. "Follow me, and I will take you to my study, where the portrait is."

The painter led the way towards a door at the further extremity of the room.

He was followed by Jack and the whole of the guests, who were everyone anxious to compare the portrait with the original, and pass their opinion upon it.

The studio was quickly reached.

The most prominent object in this apartment was a newly-painted portrait on an easel which stood near the centre of it.

This was the portrait of Jack Sheppard.

A strong light from a lamp was thrown upon the canvas, and Jack showed his appreciation of the fidelity of the likeness by uttering a shout of astonishment.

Murmurs of approbation came from the guests as they noted the excellence of the portrait.

The resemblance was, indeed, perfect, and it seemed as though not another touch was wanting.

This done, Jack now proceeded to take his leave.

He was anxious to be gone, for he feared that daylight would overtake him before he could reach the wood in which he had found so safe an abiding-place.

A strange, indefinable feeling, too, took possession of his breast.

The presentiment of coming danger seemed to cast its shadow over him.

Jack Sheppard was not one who altogether disregarded such feelings.

Each moment that he remained only served, therefore, to increase his anxiety.

Could he but have known what was taking place close at hand he would have been inclined to attach more importance than ever to the presentiment he experienced.

When Sir James Thornhill told Jack Sheppard that he could place confidence in the assembled guests he spoke the truth.

Not one of them would for a moment have thought of betraying him.

The painter imagined, too, that he could place confidence in his servants, but in this supposition he was mistaken.

That he had painted Jack Sheppard's portrait was quite a notorious fact, and therefore it could not fail to be known by all the members of his household.

They, like the rest of the world, felt a very great degree of curiosity upon the subject, and if the reader knows anything of servants he will easily believe that they took efficient means to satisfy their curiosity.

Although strictly and specially forbidden to do so, they all managed to enter the studio and have a peep at the portrait.

Its appearance was, as a matter of course, well commented upon.

But, of all the servants in Sir James Thornhill's mansion, the one that felt the greatest amount of curiosity and interest upon this subject was a negro.

He was employed to wait upon the guests.

While engaged in this capacity he heard the whole of the conversation between his master and his guests; and, though he could not comprehend all that was said, yet he had little trouble in arriving at the conclusion that Jack Sheppard was about to pay a visit to the house.

The negro's eyes rolled and his teeth glistened when he thought of the large reward which was offered for Jack's apprehension.

"Me hab dat!" he muttered to himself as he was arranging the articles upon a sideboard at the extremity of the room; "me hab dat money and de buccra man! Plenty eat—plenty drink! No work! Oh, golly!"

His ruminations were put an end to by the arrival of Jack Sheppard, who entered the room in the manner we have described.

The negro bustled about, pretending to be busily occupied, but from time to time he glanced stealthily towards Jack, who he would have had no difficulty in recognising, from his resemblance to the portrait, even if the guests and Sir James had not spoken so freely as they did.

The negro's mind was now fully made up.

Like the rest of his race, he had a wholesome horror of work, and to be enabled to eat, drink, sleep, and do nothing, was the height of his ambition.

He had never thought he should attain it, but he believed he now had the means within his grasp.

Accordingly, he took the earliest opportunity he could of slipping out of the room.

He left the house by a private door, and ran as fast as his legs could carry him to the Westminster police station.

Upon arriving here, he made his statement to the officers, and they, overjoyed at the prospect of effecting the capture of so notorious a character, followed the negro with the utmost willingness.

They took his advice, and did not enter the mansion, but posted themselves opposite to the door, so that they could observe everyone who came out.

As soon as Jack Sheppard appeared, they would pounce upon him, and carry him off to Newgate in triumph.

From where they stood, they could see the door easily.

The negro, fearing his absence would be noted, now returned to the house and resumed his duties.

The officers on the watch whiled away the time with considering by what means they could cheat the negro out of his share of the reward, and as several were cunning fellows, there was little doubt they would succeed in overreaching the African.

We should not regret any loss he might thus sustain.

Such was the aspect of affairs on the exterior of Sir James Thornhill's house when Jack was about to leave it.

Beyond the vague presentiment of coming danger which weighed so heavily upon his spirits, he had no idea of the perilous position in which he stood.

We tremble for his safety.

Had he been upon his guard, it would have been another matter.

He could then have taken precautions to escape.

But it seemed that if he appeared upon the doorstep, that moment he would be a prisoner.

Sir James Thornhill made no attempt to detain him, after finding how much he desired to go; but he set the example of making Jack a present of a small sum of money, which was followed by all the guests, without exception.

Jack had no hesitation about receiving this money.

He well knew how useful it would be to him in the plans which he was determined to carry out, despite the opposition of Jonathan Wild.

This done, Sir James beckoned the negro to approach, and then instructed him to lead Jack to the door.

His eyes gleamed when he received this order.

He did not anticipate that Fortune would favour him so far.

Never in his life had he obeyed a command so willingly.

"Come sar!" he said. "Dis way, if you please, sar!"

Jack darted a keen look into his countenance.

It did not reassure him.

He felt somehow that he was gazing on an enemy.

The negro's face, too, had a very treacherous look, which would scarcely have escaped the notice of a less observant person than Jack Sheppard.

Despite the dislike he had taken to his conductor, Jack had no other resource than to follow him to the door.

While descending the staircase, Jack caught a glimpse of the negro's countenance.

It was now expressive of malicious triumph.

"That rascal has been up to something," thought Jack,

who, as he then felt, was inclined to view every circumstance with suspicion. "I must keep a sharp look-out, and be continually on my guard!"

This was a wise determination for Jack to make, let things turn out as they would.

As he looked around him and saw how quiet the house appeared to be, his suspicions in a great measure abated, and yet he shivered when the front door was opened.

He attributed that, however, to the sudden change of temperature.

In another second, however, he heard a low whistle which he knew well as a signal by which police-officers communicated with each other.

A hurried rush of feet followed, and then a voice cried: "There he is my lads! There he is! Hurrah! Forward! We have him!"

"Igh! Igh!" said the negro, and as he uttered this guttural laugh, he sprang forward and grasped Jack Sheppard tightly by the arm.

CHAPTER CCCXVI.

THE POLICE OFFICERS MAKE AN UNEXPECTED ENTRY INTO THE CELLAR AT CHARING CROSS.

To turn around like lightning was Jack Sheppard's first impulse.

He caught sight of the grinning features of the negro.

Then with a rapidity which astonished that sable individual beyond measure, Jack doubled up his fist and struck him two terrific blows between the eyes.

He followed them up with another blow delivered with full force in the stomach.

This put the finishing stroke to the negro's discomfiture.

Uttering howls of pain and rage, he let go his hold and sank down upon the steps, where he writhed his body about like some wounded reptile.

But by this time, the officers arrived upon the scene of action, and then a struggle of the most fearful nature ensued.

When Jack saw the number of his opponents, he felt almost ready to sink with despair.

But he rallied himself.

Right and left he dealt his blows with a force and precision that produced a wonderful execution among his foes.

To continue such a contest in the hope of being eventually victorious, Jack well knew to be futile, and having dealt a few staggering blows, he darted forward like an arrow, and broke through the ranks of the police-officers.

Not a moment was lost in commencing a vigorous pursuit.

But Jack had got the start.

He was rested and refreshed, and, as he well knew, possessed of rather unusual fleetness of foot.

Away then, he bounded like a hare.

The officers came on at his heels like a pack of hungry hounds.

They uttered loud and fierce shouts and cries, in order that passers-by might join in the pursuit.

Although they had failed in their first attempt to secure him, the officers felt pretty sure they should overtake him in the end.

Jack Sheppard plunged at random into the labyrinth of streets surrounding Westminster Abbey.

By continually doubling upon his track, he founded his hope of eluding his pursuers.

But though he had the start, yet it was so slight a one, that he was not able to get out of sight of his pursuers for more than a quarter of a minute at the time.

They kept up the chase with great vigour and determination.

Jack Sheppard, however, had upon his mind the conviction, that if he was captured once again, all hope of ever making his escape would be at an end.

He seemed to feel that he had made his last escape, and that if he once again entered the gloomy walls of Newgate, he would never again leave them, save in the cart appointed to convey him to Tyburn.

If one thing then, was more calculated than another to cause Jack to make the utmost exertion, that was.

He felt that he was flying not for his liberty, but for his life.

He felt that if he was captured, the penalty would be death.

Can it be wondered at then, if he seemed to bound over the ground at a speed that really seemed to be superhuman.

Ere long, he had the satisfaction of perceiving that he had increased the distance between the police-officers and himself.

In spite of all they could do, they could not overtake him.

A great many people, attracted by the cries and shouts of the officers, had joined in the pursuit.

Quite a mob, then, was at Jack's heels, and each moment its size was augmented in spite of the falling off of those who found it impossible to run any further.

The fugitive's chances of escape were therefore very few indeed.

But, urged on by the feelings which we have described, Jack ran with incredible speed, and his tremendous exertions were at length rewarded by his obtaining a still better start of them.

Now that he had once increased the distance between his foes and himself, he was well aware that he had only to continue his exertions to make a very great difference, indeed; while, if he once lost ground he could scarcely hope to regain it.

It was a very tortuous route that Jack took, and one that led him nowhere near his destination.

Indeed, he had not studied much where he was going, but now, on looking around him, he perceived himself in the vicinity of Charing Cross, then a spot quite out of town.

Jack looked behind him.

His pursuers were not in sight.

Now was, then, the opportunity to seek some place of refuge.

The time allowed him for selecting it was brief indeed.

In another moment his foes would be in sight again, and he would have lost the by no means inconsiderable advantage which he had gained.

Jack looked around him for a place of concealment in rather a strange manner.

"Where would they think the most unlikely place for me to go?" he asked himself. "I want to find some place which they will pass by at once under the belief that I could not possibly have sought shelter there. By this means, and this only, can I hope to elude them."

At this moment Jack's eyes fell upon a place which he fancied would just answer his purpose, and he directed his steps towards it without further hesitation.

This place was a cellar, though the word, considered under its usual signification, would altogether fail to give an idea of the nature of the place to which it was applied.

It was, indeed, an underground place, and so the word cellar might be appropriately enough applied to it; but it was used as a kind of public-house, with this difference, that tables of every description could be obtained there.

It was at night that these places were open, and in a general way there was no lack of customers.

The entrance was from the pavement of the street by means of a flight of wide steps.

Down these Jack made his way in as unconcerned a manner as could possibly be imagined.

Reaching the bottom of the steps he pushed open a door, and then entered the cellar—a place which, from the singularity of its character, well merits a few words of description.

Imagine, then, a large and cavernous-looking apartment, filled with men and women of all grades seated round tables, busily engaged in eating and drinking.

Such was the scene which Jack beheld immediately upon passing through the doorway.

The tables were placed in such a manner as to accommodate the greatest possible number of customers.

Several flaming oil-lamps depending from the ceiling, and a number of candles in rude candlesticks upon the tables, illuminated the cellar.

The uproar was prodigious.

Shouting, swearing, singing, knocking, were mingled with the jingling of glasses and the clatter of knives and forks.

But little could be seen, however, for the atmosphere, close and stifling as it was, was heavily laden with tobacco smoke, which gave to all objects a hazy look.

Hot joints smoked upon the various tables, and ale and spirits were there in great profusion.

Jack Sheppard was no stranger to such places as these, and therefore he made his way to the further end of the cellar in a manner that was well calculated not to attract more than passing notice.

To have seen him, no one would have believed that he stood in such tremendous peril as he did.

His face was calm, and his movements unconcerned.

Seating himself where he could command a distant view of the door, Jack ordered refreshment of the waiter.

He was served quickly, and he set to work to eat and drink, so as to give the appearance of his having been in the place for a much longer period of time than he really had.

He was pleased to see that arrivals kept taking place every moment.

There were no signs of his pursuers.

What had become of them he knew not.

No doubt they were searching for him in every direction, never dreaming that, with such a reward hanging over his head, he would venture to enter so public a place.

Almost unconsciously, Jack found himself listening to the conversation of those persons who sat nearest to him.

"It is such a thing as never happened before!" said one.

"The idea, now, that the old gallows, which has borne so much ripe fruit, being cut down! There is but one person alive who could have done such a thing!"

"And who is that?"

"Jack Sheppard!"

"I quite agree with you! Indeed, when Blueskin was rescued this morning, it is stated that Jack Sheppard was there and led the mob on!"

"I have no doubt he was! The whole thing, depend upon it, was planned by him from beginning to end!"

"I am of that opinion! Well, I, for one, hope he will get off, for he was a daring fellow!"

"There is not much chance of that, I am afraid!"

"Why not?"

"They are sure to have him sooner or later!"

"Well, perhaps so! Where he is now, though, no one knows, and both he and Blueskin may get out of the country undetected!"

"I am not of your opinion there!"

"For what reason?"

"Well, if you must know, Quilt Arnold, Mr. Jonathan Wild's head man, is a friend of mine!"

"Oh, indeed!"

"I knew him many years ago—but that's neither here nor there; however, he told me that Jack Sheppard and Blueskin had sworn a solemn oath together that they would not rest until they had seen Mr. Jonathan Wild hanging on the gallows at Tyburn!"

"Ha, ha!"

"You may well laugh! I look upon it as a good joke myself!"

"The idea, now, of hanging a thief-taker!"

"It is rather a droll notion, to be sure, and yet, if all I have heard is true, Jonathan Wild has done quite enough to richly deserve such a fate!"

"Hush, hush!"

"What is the matter?"

"Mind what you're saying! It's very dangerous talk, and you cannot tell who may overhear you!"

"Thanks for your caution."

"It may not be out of place. In my humble opinion, Jonathan Wild is a man who is best let alone, for he has almost unlimited powers of mischief!"

"He has! He has!"

"And I should be sorry for any harm to overtake you."

"We will change the subject, then?"

Jack listened to these words with feelings which can scarcely be described.

No doubt he formed the common topic of conversation in all the public places in London.

Hope, however, began to arise in his breast.

Some time had elapsed since his entrance and all was well.

His enemies had probably lost the scent entirely, or else gone off upon a false track.

These hopes, however, were quickly put an end to.

An unusual tumult came upon Jack's ears.

He directed his eyes towards the door.

At the same moment it was flung open rather violently upon its hinges, and a body of police-officers entered the cellar.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD FINDS THAT DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS THICKEN ABOUT HIM.

THE sudden advent of the police-officers into the cellar produced a very great amount of consternation and confusion, for a large proportion of its occupants were obnoxious to the law.

Accordingly there was an immediate tumult caused by every person in the place springing hastily to his feet.

Among so many Jack Sheppard certainly had some slight chance of escaping detection, but the chance was so slight a one that he felt it would never do to rely upon it.

"Order! order!" screamed one of the police-officers, who doubtless had command of the expedition. "Order! order! You have no call to feel alarmed, I only want one person, and when you have given him up the remainder of you will be unmolested."

The officer succeeded, by straining his lungs to the utmost, in making himself heard by the motley crew, and something approaching a silence now ensued.

"Order! order!" cried the officer again.

"Who do you want?" growled a chorus of gruff voices.

The officer paused a moment in order that his reply might come with full effect, and then he said:

"I want Jack Sheppard!"

The pronunciation of this name had a visible effect upon all those present.

Each one looked narrowly into the countenances of those who stood near him.

"A ten-pound note!" continued the officer; "I will give a ten-pound note to anyone who detects him!"

An immediate bustle ensued as soon as this order was given, but by degrees all became calm again.

"Well," said the officer, "where is he?"

There was no reply.

He repeated his question rather angrily.

"It's my belief he is not here at all. I should say this was about the last place he would poke his head into. I am almost sure he is not here."

"And who are you?" asked the officer, addressing the man who had just spoken.

"The landlord."

"Of the cellar?"

"Yes."

"Oh, indeed! Wright and Clark!"

"Yes, sir," replied two police-officers, standing forward.

"Take that man into custody," continued their superior; "and see that you keep him safe. He knows a great deal too much."

"But here, I say, mister!" vociferated the landlord, as soon as he found himself seized by the officers—"I say, mister, what have I gone and done, to be took prisoner?"

"I suspect you of harbouring and abetting a felon, to wit, Jack Sheppard, and it is my duty to keep you secure!"

"I, indeed!" said the landlord, in a rage. "Then I wish I had bit my d—d tongue off before I said a word!"

"Now!" cried the officer to the remainder of the company, who looked upon the prompt arrest of the landlord with far from comfortable feelings—"now just listen to me! I have very good reasons for believing that Jack Sheppard is in this place, and I intend to have him. There is only one way that the affair can be settled to my satisfaction, and I should advise you not to attempt any kind of resistance, because if you do, it will be all the worse for you!"

"What do you want us to do?" asked a voice.

"Something very simple!"

"Let's hear it then?"

"I want you to walk out into the street one by one, and stay there until the cellar is empty, and then you can return, and remain unmolested as long as you like. I tell you all this. It don't matter to me the toss up of a button who's here to-night. I want Jack Sheppard, and no one else, and everyone but him will be allowed to pass by!"

The officer acted very wisely in announcing his intentions in this manner, for the company generally rather shrunk from too close a scrutiny by the police-officers.

"Here am I!" said a man; "I'll make the first, and the sooner you all follow my example the sooner we shall be able to sit down in peace again!"

"Very true!" said the chief police-officer, who satisfied himself by a glance that this man, let him be whom he might, was most certainly not Jack Sheppard. "Very true! Pass on!"

The man thus addressed ascended the steps, and in another moment stood in the street just outside.

Seeing this man allowed to depart freely, and without hindrance, seemed to have an encouraging effect upon the rest, for another stepped forward, and then another.

The chief police-officer was well acquainted with the person of Jack Sheppard, and felt sure he should be able to recognise him, no matter how he might be disguised.

In most cases the slightest examination was sufficient for his purpose.

The place thinned very quickly, for all struggled towards the steps, being fearful, if they hung back, that suspicion would fall upon them.

In a very short space of time, then, the cellar was empty. No capture had been made.

The officer was certain that Jack Sheppard had not passed him.

A glance was sufficient to show that he was not in the now deserted cellar.

The officer stamped his foot with vexation.

A search in this cellar was his last hope, and it appeared to have failed him utterly.

He had lost sight of Jack, and had pursued various directions, but without succeeding in perceiving the object of his search.

Despairing altogether of effecting his purpose, he resolved to make one more attempt, and that was to search the cellar.

We have seen how the search resulted.

Jack Sheppard's disappearance, unaccountable as it may seem, is easily explained.

The officer, when the cellar was empty, made his way into it, and one of his subordinates, desirous of exhibiting his cleverness, looked under the tables and benches, thinking there was a chance that Jack had concealed himself in some such place.

But he found no trace of what he sought.

Suddenly he uttered a cry which had the effect of immediately attracting the attention of his comrades and the officer in command.

The latter saw in an instant what had caused the utterance of the cry, and sprang forward with a shout of anger.

"This is the secret!" he cried. "Look, here is a door! You may depend he passed through it at the first alarm! And who is to tell where he is now?"

"We shall have him, sir—never fear!" replied one of his men. "You forget that this place is so well surrounded that he cannot leave without being seen!"

"True—true! I had for the moment forgotten that important circumstance. Follow me, and we shall soon see where he is!"

The officer sprang to the door as he spoke, and attempted to open it.

But it was fast.

"Down with it!" he cried. "Down with it! Our passage must not be stayed by a door!"

As he spoke, he himself set the example of flinging his body against the door.

It shook before the blow, but did not give way.

Another rush, however, did the business.

The police-officers now found themselves at the foot of a flight of steps, which led upwards in a spiral direction.

They ascended these without hesitation, and quickly arrived at the top.

Here they looked around them, and then opened a door.

They found themselves in a room which, in contrast with the steps, seemed to be one blaze of light.

The first glance showed them what this place was.

It was the bar where the requisite liquors for those below could be obtained.

The room was empty, and the police-officers immediately made their way to a door that led out into the passage.

Just as one put his hand upon the knob, however, a loud shout came from the outside of the building.

"They have found him!" cried the chief officer. "Forward, and the reward will yet be ours!"

The men uttered a cry of gratification, and made their way, as well as they could judge, towards the spot from whence the sound had come.

They soon ceased to have any doubts upon this point, for the uproar continued and appeared to increase.

Before, however, we will follow the officers any further, we will return to Jack Sheppard and relate his proceedings.

When the officers, then, burst into the cellar, Jack, in common with the rest, sprang hurriedly to his feet.

He had had his eye fixed for some time upon a door close by, through which, he observed, the waiters continually passed.

"That must lead somewhere," he muttered, "and should occasion arise, I will pop through!"

He came to the determination just in time, for immediately afterwards the officers appeared.

In the general scene of confusion which ensued, Jack found it the easiest matter in the world to slip through the door unperceived.

Attention was universally directed towards the officers.

Upon passing through the door, Jack's first care was to pass his hand down the edge of it in order to ascertain whether it had any fastenings upon that side or not.

His hand almost immediately encountered a bolt, which he shot into its socket.

There was another bolt near the bottom of the door, and this he treated in the same manner.

Then, having assured himself that he had covered his retreat, he turned round and perceived the flight of steps.

He listened.

No sound, however, came from above, and so, as light as foot could fall, he slipped up the stairs.

Upon reaching the top he paused again and listened.

The low murmur of voices struck upon his ear, and, looking straight before him, he could perceive the outline of a door which was made visible by a bright line of light appearing all around it.

That this door led into a room, and that the murmur of voices came from some persons in that room was an easily-formed supposition.

Jack now found himself very awkwardly situated.

He could not tell how soon the officers might attack the little door at the bottom of the steps, which the reader will admit was but a poor defence against his foes.

To open the door close to which he stood was, however, by far too dangerous to be thought of.

And so, in a state of mind which we will not attempt to describe, Jack stood at the top of the flight of steps, listening intently to every sound.

He was surprised that he heard nothing of the officers, though he would have ceased to wonder had he been aware of what was really taking place.

Such a thing, however, never for a moment entered his thoughts.

Presently, however, the murmuring of voices ceased, and the sound of footsteps succeeded.

Then a door was closed, after which all was silent, and Jack began to indulge in the hope that the room, or whatever the place was, on the other side of the door was vacant.

He listened.

Finding all was still, he slowly and silently turned the handle round until the latch was raised, and then opened the door to the extent of about half an inch.

He could see nothing, nor was any notice taken of the opening of the door.

This confirmed him in his idea that the room had been left.

After waiting a moment, for he was fearful of ruining all by any undue precipitation, he opened the door wider, and perceiving there was no one in sight, he crossed the threshold and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER CCCXCVIII.

JACK SHEPPARD FINDS A NOVEL HIDING PLACE FROM HIS PURSUERS.

PANTING and breathless with excitement, Jack Sheppard stood within this room.

With one hand he grasped the knob of the door which he had just closed, and with his body bent forward, and an anxious look upon his face, he listened for any sounds which would indicate the approach of his foes.

But all was still.

No sound came from below or from around him.

Re-assured, Jack crossed the bar in the direction of the only door he could see.

Opening this he emerged into a passage, but where this said passage led he had no very clear idea.

He glided along it for a few feet, and then he was startled by some one approaching.

He glanced around him for some place of concealment, and by good luck he found he was standing at the foot of a flight of stairs, which, from their appearance, seemed to lead up to the bedrooms of the house.

This staircase Jack did not hesitate to ascend.

He sprang up three steps at a time, and without making a scarcely audible sound.

Just as he reached the top, however, he saw some one pass the foot, and then a door slammed, which made him fancy that the person he had just seen had entered the bar.

He congratulated himself upon his narrow escape.

Had he lingered in the bar or entered it a moment later than he did, he would have been discovered.

An anxious question now obtruded itself upon his consideration.

What was he to do?

How was he to escape?

It would not do to remain where he then was.

The officers would search the house from top to bottom, and he would be discovered if he attempted to conceal himself.

Then, in all probability, the house was well watched and surrounded, so that the moment he made his appearance on the outside, he would be pounced upon and made prisoner before he had even a chance of getting away.

What, then, was he to do?

He pressed his hands over his temples, and sat down on the top of the stairs in deep and anxious thought.

"I see but one chance!" he said—"only one chance, and that is a desperate one, for I am wholly ignorant of the interior arrangements of the house! Nevertheless, it must be tried, and that at once, or it will fail me!"

Jack rose quickly to his feet as he half muttered these words.

What it was that he intended to do will very quickly be seen.

The top of the stairs was profoundly dark, and Jack had no other guide for his progress than that afforded him by his hands.

With these outstretched before him, he crossed a landing, feeling carefully about him for the flight of stairs above.

He was not long finding these, and taking hold of the bannister, he mounted quickly enough, and with much less trouble than he had done before, for he had ascertained the shape and construction of the staircase, he ascended the next flight.

In this way he continued until he reached the top of the house.

A faint gleam of light, which came through a small window on this top landing, enabled him to indistinctly see about him.

He looked up, and saw, in the white ceiling above his head, a black patch which pointed out the position of the trap-door which led out on to the tiles.

In London, few houses are to be found without these trap-doors, their use being to enable the inmates to reach the roof in case of fire, and when the staircases might have been impracticable.

Jack had fully expected to find one of these trap-doors, and this calculation was shown to be a correct one.

The first thing he did, however, was to grope round and round for the short ladder by which the trap-door could be reached.

He found this reared up against the wall.

Easily enough he moved it, placed it in its required position, and then ascended.

The construction of these trap-doors does not differ much, and so, although it was dark, Jack had no trouble in undoing the fastenings of this one.

Raising it up, he crept out on to the tiles, taking the precaution to pull the ladder after him.

He did this in order to make it as difficult a matter as possible for the officers to follow him, and because the ladder might be of service to him in getting from one house to another.

The plan Jack had formed was a very good one.

It was to make his way over the house-tops with all speed possible, until he got to a distance, and then to enter another house, and so make his way into the street.

If he could manage this without having the officers too close at his heels, he had strong hopes that he would be able to make his escape.

Thus stimulated to make all possible exertions, Jack crept down the slanting portion of the roof, until he reached the gutter, which was defended by a low parapet.

A feeling of curiosity which he could not repress induced him to look over.

That was an unfortunate act, and it would have been well for him if he had resisted the inclination.

A loud shout came from below, which told him in a moment that he was seen.

A curse came from his lips, and so greatly was he enraged, that he seized the ladder with both hands, and flung it with full force down upon the people who he could see were collected there.

Without waiting to see the effect of this, he hurried over the roofs with more speed than was consistent with safety.

But he was reckless now, and almost despaired of being able to make his escape at all.

This, then, was the shout which struck upon the ears of the chief officer and his party when they emerged into the passage.

Of course they could not tell what was the cause of it, and the only thing they could do was to make their way to the spot from whence the sound emanated.

Upon arriving here and learning that Jack Sheppard had been seen on the roof, they felt much enraged, as they ought to have ascended the stairs at once.

However, the chief officer fancied that it was not yet too late to effect his purpose, and resolved to make the best of a bad job.

Accordingly, he gave instructions that the alarm should be spread, so that the inhabitants of the various houses should be on their guard against the intruder, and then, at the head of his men, he dashed back into the house, and ascended the stairs.

Some delay took place in reaching the trap-door in consequence of Jack having removed the ladder, but a substitute was formed by placing a chair on a table, both of which articles of furniture they dragged out of the nearest bedroom.

When the chair and table were thus placed, it was the easiest matter in the world to reach the trap-door, and in another moment the whole party was standing on the roof.

The officer looked about him, but could see nothing of the fugitive, and had it not been for the people in the street below, he would have been at a loss which way to turn.

From them, however, he learned by signs which way the fugitive had gone, and he commenced the pursuit in good earnest.

Still he could see nothing of Jack, nor did any open garret window seem to point to the fact that he had sought shelter in one of the houses.

A roaring sound came from the street below, and from time to time the officers looked over the parapet in order to ascertain the state of affairs.

Nothing could be learned, however, beyond the fact that the fugitive had not been seen.

Suddenly the police-officers were compelled to come to a halt.

Before them there was a chasm of such a tremendous width, that it was out of the question to think that the fugitive had crossed it.

He had either entered one of the houses or else they had passed him on the roofs.

This latter contingency was not entertained for a moment, for the officers had one and all taken special pains to guard against it.

They adopted the former supposition without the least hesitation, but felt it would be no easy task to ascertain

into which of the houses it was that he had penetrated.

Leaving them thus engaged, we will return to Jack Sheppard.

His first burst of rage at being seen was quickly over.

His recklessness ceased, indeed, when he made a false step and rolled down the rough tiles.

Had it not been for the low parapet, against which his body went with considerable force, he would have rolled down into the street.

As it was he saved this.

Scrambling to his feet he placed his hand with a puzzled expression, to his brow, and wondered what he had better do next.

The exigency of his position quickened his invention.

"Yes, yes!" he said. "In another moment, or less, they will be here, and then what shall I do? The alarm will be spread. The inhabitants of every house will be on the look-out for me. The moment I enter one I shall be seized, or at any rate, I shall find it impossible to gain the street. Let me think—what can I do? I know. I must hide somewhere, and let the officers pass me when they come out upon the roof, and then double upon my steps and so escape. But where shall I hide, that is the question?"

That was, indeed, the question, and one that it was very hard to find an answer to.

Jack looked around him thoughtfully.

At length his eyes rested upon a chimney, the height of which was but a few feet above the tiles.

"I think that will do," he said; "it must do, in fact, for I can see no other place. Here goes, then, for it will be a desperate venture!"

As he spoke these words, Jack Sheppard crept on his hands and knees towards the chimney.

Then as soon as he reached it he rose up slowly, so that the shadow which it cast was sufficient to hide him from the observation of the watchers in the street, if any should happen to have their eyes directed towards that particular spot.

The mouth of the chimney was a good size.

Jack looked down with a misgiving air.

Fearing, however, each moment to see the officers appear upon the roof, when all hope of hiding himself would be at an end, he hastened to execute his intention, though it was easy to see it was repugnant to him.

Raising himself up, Jack gradually got to a sitting position on the top of the chimney.

A turn of his body now enabled him to drop his feet and legs into it.

Then seizing the edge of the brickwork with his hands, he gradually lowered himself into the chimney until not a sign of him could be seen.

He displaced the soot in rather large quantities—indeed, he was half choked by it.

Jack's intention was to remain here holding the edge of the chimney until the officers went by.

Then, as soon as they had passed, he would draw himself up, get on the tiles again, and then creep stealthily along the roof, in a direction just opposite to that taken by his foes.

Jack Sheppard had fully expected that he would have to remain all the time holding by his hands, and he doubted whether his strength would suffice for this.

By accident, however, he struck his foot against something which he found was a projection in the wall of the chimney.

Upon this he was able to place his feet, and support his body by pressing his back against the wall.

CHAPTER CCCXCIX.

JACK SHEPPARD SEEKS REFUGE AT THE LITTLE PUBLIC-HOUSE IN RUPERT STREET.

It was fortunate for Jack that he made this discovery, for even had he possessed sufficient strength in his arms and fingers to hang thus for a length of time, it is highly probable that the exertion would have so exhausted him as to make it impossible for him to pull himself up.

Now, however, there would not be much trouble, and he remained contentedly enough listening for the approach of his foes.

He was not kept long in suspense.

Ere long, he heard unmistakeable sounds, which indicated the presence of the officers upon the roof.

He listened intently, for he had no other sense to guide him.

The trampling of feet came nearer and nearer, until they reached the chimney.

Jack felt pretty well at his ease.

Even if the officers were curious enough to peep down the chimney, he had little doubt of eluding their observation, for, of course, the interior was a uniform mass of black.

No such thing, however, was attempted, and in less than a moment he had the satisfaction of hearing their retreating footsteps.

He waited until he thought they were far enough off, and then he set about leaving his unpleasant hiding-place.

He drew himself up until he could just see over the top of the chimney, and then he paused and gazed about him.

All was well.

The officers were at a distance, and busily engaged in exploring the roof.

Cautiously and stealthily Jack drew himself up higher, until at length he reached the tiles again.

Crouching down, then, so as to avoid the possibility of his body being seen by anyone in the street below, Jack crept along the gutter.

He was consoled by the thought that each step took him further and further from his enemies.

After going some distance, he came to a halt, determined, without further loss of time to make a descent into the street.

Could he succeed in doing this, he had strong hopes he should be able to achieve a complete escape.

There was no easier means of reaching the street than to look out for some unfastened garret-window, through which he could pass, and so descend the stairs, and walk out either of the front or back-door, as circumstances might render expedient.

This, then, was the course which he resolved to adopt.

Fortune favoured him so far that the second garret-window he came to yielded to his touch.

To spring into the room, and close the window behind him was the work of but a moment merely.

The attic into which he had intruded was empty.

The fact of the window being unfastened was almost a sufficient guarantee of this, and so, as noiselessly as a ghost, Jack stole to the door, and leaned over the banisters to listen for any sounds of alarm.

But all was profoundly still, and this was nothing to be surprised at, for the hour was one when most people had retired to rest.

The inhabitants of that house were doubtless all wrapped in slumber, and, acting upon this supposition, Jack descended the stairs as swiftly as was consonant with security and silence.

No alarm was given, and at length, to his inexpressible satisfaction, the bottom of the stairs was reached without a soul in the house having been disturbed.

All that now remained for Jack to do in order to perfect his escape, was to leave the house unperceived.

This was by far the most difficult part of the enterprise.

If he was seen, all his previous success would go for naught.

A light would have been of the greatest service at this juncture, but he had not one, and so he was obliged to grope his way in the best way he could.

After some trouble he succeeded in finding the front door.

It was fastened in a complicated manner, but by exercising his patience he was enabled to undo them all silently.

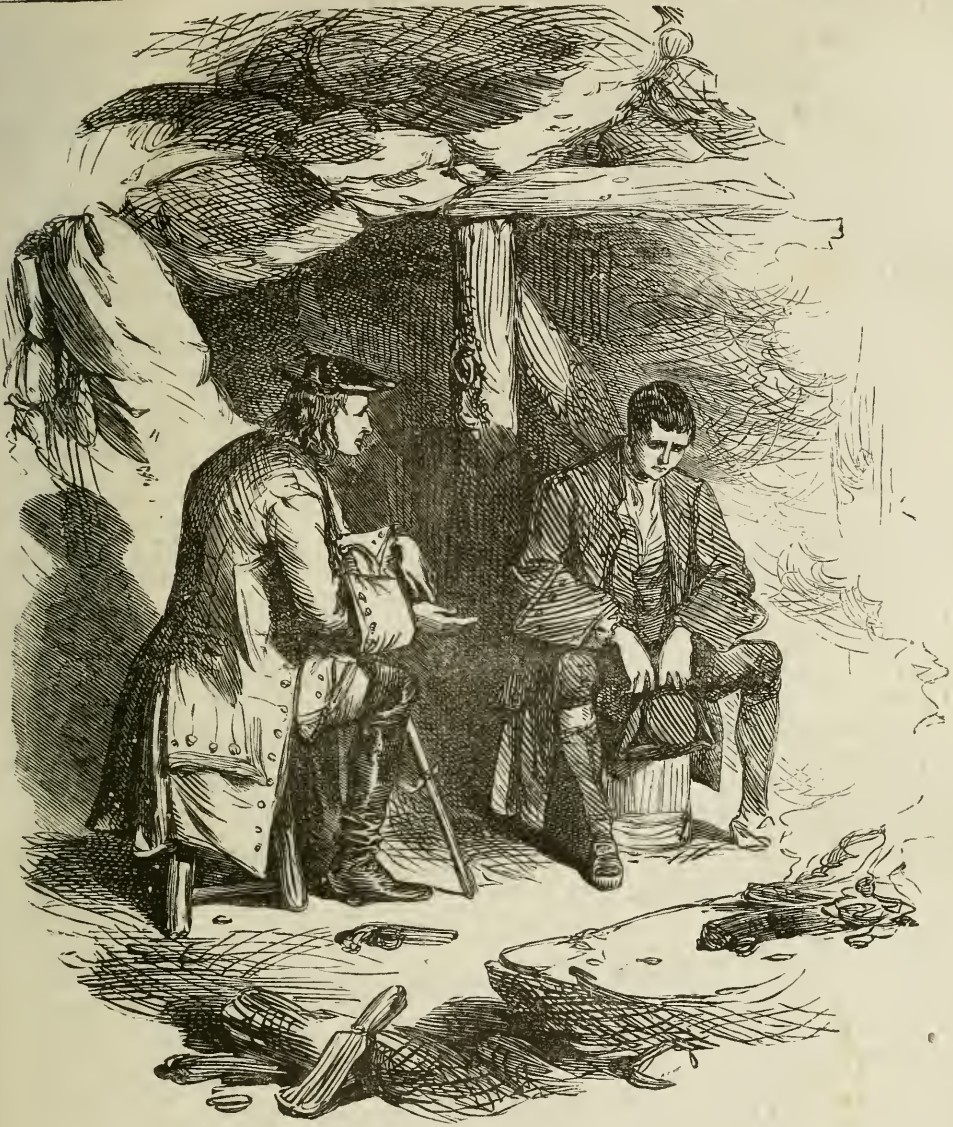
Cautiously and hesitatingly he opened the door and peeped out.

The street was silent and deserted.

The door was defended by some kind of porch or portico, and the shadow of this Jack thought would conceal him when he emerged.

He opened the door no wider than was necessary to allow the passage of his body, and closed it silently after him.

As he expected, the shadow of the porch was quite



BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD HOLD A CONSULTATION IN THE CAVERN.

sufficient to conceal him, and from this place he looked out.

Some little distance down on his right hand, he saw a dim, undefined mass of something.

This was a crowd of people, and from them came that strange roaring sound which is always audible when a multitude assemble.

Jack needed nothing more to guide him in the direction he had to go.

Keeping close in the shadow of the houses, and looking cautiously around him whenever a lighter spot than usual in his path had to be crossed, he took his way westward, for he was anxious to reach the cave where he had left Blueskin before day dawned.

So far as he could tell, he had stolen away unseen.

He could see no signs of his pursuers, and he was not aware that he left any track behind.

As he increased his distance from the scene of the late events, so did he increase his pace until he went forward.

No. 83.—BLUESKIN.

Suddenly, however, he reeled, and almost fell to the ground.

By a strong effort he recovered himself, but for a moment or so, he was quite unable to proceed.

"I am exhausted!" he murmured. "Many hours have elapsed since I either satisfied hunger or thirst, and I have recently made some tremendous exertions! What am I to do? I cannot go further without first obtaining some refreshment, and where is there that I can obtain it?"

Jack looked all around him as he asked himself this question, and then he exclaimed:

"How fortunate! Why this is Soho! And now I recollect there is an old woman I knew in happier days, who keeps a public-house somewhere close at hand! I will go to her at once—no doubt she will give me the refreshment I require! Let me think a moment! It is in Rupert Street!"

From this thoroughfare Jack was not very far distant, and he immediately bent his steps in that direction.

The hope of being able to procure what he required lent him strength to go with increased speed, and ere many moments had elapsed he arrived at his destination.

He had scarcely expected to find the house open, and he was proportionably joyful when he saw the door ajar and a dim light in the interior.

He entered without hesitation, and walked straight up to the bar, the position of which was well known to him, for he had been in the house many times before.

The landlady was sitting in a crouching attitude over the fire, but upon his entrance she rose to her feet.

Jack forgot, at the moment, how changed his personal appearance was, and he felt surprised that the old woman should not recognise him.

Recollecting himself, however, the next moment, he asked for some refreshment.

A customer was almost a novelty at the poor widow's house, and with great obsequiousness she showed Jack into a very comfortable tap-room.

Here Jack seated himself, and in a little while the landlady placed on the table a plain though very tempting repast, together with some ale of first-rate quality.

While thus engaged, she endeavoured to enter into conversation with Jack, who, it was clear, she failed to recognise.

She did this, probably, with a view of making herself agreeable to her visitor, or else it was because she was naturally of a loquacious disposition, and was pleased beyond measure when she had anyone to talk to.

"I s'pose you've heard about what has taken place at Tyburn this morning, when Blueskin was to have been hanged?"

"I have heard something about it."

"Of course you have. Who is there in London that hasn't?"

"Very few, I suppose."

"I never knew so much talk about anything in all my life. Whatever do you think of Jack Sheppard?"

"Who—I?" asked Jack, who was for a moment nonplussed by this question. "Oh, I don't know! I should like to hear your opinion."

The landlady shook her head.

"Ah!" she said, "I can't help feeling sorry!"

"Sorry for whom?"

"Jack Sheppard."

"Indeed?"

"Ah yes, sir! I can recollect him when he was a mere child. He has been here many and many a time!"

"You surprise me!" said Sheppard, who resolved not to declare himself at present.

"But it's a case with him, I believe. He has escaped from Newgate, it is true, but the officers will soon have him again!"

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh, I have heard that every effort will be made to secure his apprehension."

"But he may leave England."

"Ah, no, sir! There is no fear of that. Not a ship is allowed to leave England without first being examined; so you see he is in prison even now, although his prison is a large one."

"It is," said Jack; "and so you think he will be captured?"

"I have little doubt of it; but I shall be really sorry for him, poor young man! I believe myself that it is more Jonathan Wild's fault than his own."

"I have heard the same thing."

"It is true, no doubt. A dreadful wretch is that Jonathan Wild."

"I quite agree with you—he is. But now, what should you think was Jack Sheppard's chief danger?"

"Chief danger?"

"Yes."

"I don't quite understand you, sir."

"Why, which would be the most likely cause of his being apprehended?"

"I really don't know; what do you think?"

"Well, in my opinion the chief peril he has to guard against is treachery."

"Treachery?"

"Yes, treachery! For instance, he might put faith in some person who did not know him, and declare himself, and then be betrayed by that person to the police."

"But that would be base."

"I grant you it would—very base; but then, in a general way, people are not very particular in such matters."

"You are quite right, sir."

"Cannot you see that it would indeed be a terrible danger if he was betrayed to his foes?"

"I can quite understand it, sir; and all I can say is, that those persons who would act in such a manner ought to—to—I don't know what they would deserve!"

Jack smiled at the landlady's earnestness.

"Then you would not betray him, I suppose?"

"Who—I? Do you wish to insult me, sir?"

"By no means—by no means! Quite the reverse, I assure you!"

"Then what did you ask such a thing for? Me betray him? No, no—and I hope a curse will fall on those who do!"

"And so do I; and, to prove to you that I fully believe you are in earnest, I will simply say that I am Jack Sheppard!"

CHAPTER CCCC.

THE POLICE-OFFICERS FOLLOW HARD UPON THE TRACK OF JACK SHEPPARD.

THIS was a revelation which the landlady was not at all prepared for, and she opened her eyes to quite a preternatural extent, and gasped once or twice for breath.

Jack Sheppard had discovered himself because he fully believed that he would be likely to secure his own safety by doing so.

He could not tell what might happen in the course of the next few moments, and it might be of service to him if the landlady knew who he really was.

Observing her astonishment, he continued:

"Yes, I am indeed Jack Sheppard! I know I can trust you, and so I declared myself. I thought you would have recognised me, but I have much altered."

"You have indeed!" said the landlady, recovering herself. "Well, dear me, who would have thought of such a thing? I had no idea who you were, though I fancied the voice was familiar to me!"

"Your ears did not deceive you."

"Oh, I know you now, fast enough! Ah, Jack! I little thought that things would ever come to such a pass as this."

"Nor did I. But, come! Never mind the past. What's done can't be helped, and what now remains for me to do is to seek safety by flight."

"You know what I told you just now."

"Oh, yes! I know all about that; but still, I think I shall be able to elude their vigilance, and in another land I shall find that rest and repose which I have never known here."

"But how is it," asked the landlady, "that you are here? Here, in the very heart of London! How is it that you do not seek to find safety in flight?"

"That is too long a story to tell now," said Jack. "Let it suffice for me to say that circumstances will not permit me to leave London just at present."

The landlady shook her head.

"Ah, then," she said, "it will indeed be all over with you! Such close search is being made for you in all directions that you cannot possibly for long withstand detection."

"We shall see."

"We shall! But you are in great danger even here."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"It is a mystery to me how you have entered unseen."

"Is the house watched, then?"

"I fear so."

"But how?"

"That is more than I can tell you."

"How do you know it?"

"The officers have been here several times."

"This is most serious!" cried Jack, starting to his feet; "I had no idea I was in such peril!"

"I speak true."

"I do not doubt you for a moment. Still, I am at a loss to think why this house should be watched."

"Perhaps they fancied you would come here."

"But what grounds could they have for thinking such a thing?"

"That is more than I can tell; but probably they are aware that in former times you paid visits here."

"Ah, I see now!"

"And you may depend upon it," continued the landlady, "that any place which has ever been visited by you will be very closely watched indeed, in the hope that you may turn up."

"You are right. Still, I have reached here in safety."

"But you do not know how long you may remain safe."

"True!"

"The officers even now may be meditating an attack upon this place, and have lingered thus long in order to take effectual means to accomplish their end!"

This was not only a very probable supposition of the landlady's, but it was a very alarming one too.

"It seems," said Jack, "that this is about the last place I ought to have shown my face in."

"The very last, though, rely upon it, a close watch is kept upon every house where you have once been known to be."

"No doubt of it, and I shall therefore be careful to avoid them. But I must ask you to render me a service."

"What is it? You have only to name it for it to be performed."

"Thanks—thanks!"

"What is it you wish me to do?"

"To go to the front door and try whether you can ascertain anything concerning the proceedings of the police officers."

"Gladly—gladly! It may be that they have given over their watch upon this place, and if so, all will be well."

"I should be glad to hear that they have done so."

"I will go and see."

"Do so—do so at once; and, above all things, be careful not to excite suspicion!"

"I will, you may depend!"

With these words the landlady quitted the room, leaving Jack in a far from comfortable frame of mind.

Anxiously—most anxiously—did he listen to every sound, and await her return with nervous impatience.

He shuddered when he thought of the frightful risk he had run by venturing into that place.

But he had escaped, and might he not reasonably enough augur from this that he would be able to escape a second time?

He could not feel very comfortable about it either, for he well knew that it was one thing to enter a place and another to leave it.

The first the officers would probably allow him to do readily enough, while it was likely they would resist the other with all the power they possessed.

This was what Jack dreaded, and very reasonably too.

A few minutes only elapsed until the landlady returned, but the term of her absence really seemed to be an age.

"Well?" asked Jack, impatiently, the moment she made her appearance.

"It is not well, but the reverse."

"What has happened?"

"Nothing—nothing!"

"What have you seen?"

"Why, quite enough to convince me that this house is watched more closely than ever."

"Is it possible?"

"It is quite true. I distinctly saw several police-officers hovering about."

"But what can be their object in doing that? If they fancy I am here, why do they not come in and see?"

"I cannot tell you that, Jack," replied the landlady; "you ought to be able to understand the movements of your foes the best."

"Yes, yes—I ought! Wait a moment! Let me think!"

As he spoke these words, Jack Sheppard clasped his hands tightly over his face and strove to arrive at some conclusion concerning the movements of his enemies.

"I cannot tell," he said, at length. "It may be that they think of effecting their capture more easily by giving no alarm, and pouncing upon me the moment I go out."

"That might be their motive; but I don't think it is."

"What is your opinion, then?"

"I fancy that they have set a good watch while one has gone off for reinforcements, so that when the attack is made it shall be effectual."

"By heaven, you are right! I am sure that is it!"

"Oh, Jack—Jack! what will you do? I am afraid it is all over with you!"

"No, no! have no such fear! I shall escape them, never fear—I shall escape them! Their extra carefulness will be the means of ensuring my safety!"

The landlady shook her head at this speech, as though to imply that she did not comprehend it.

But Jack took no notice of this.

"Listen to me!" he said; "pay attention for one moment—only one!"

"I am all attention, Jack!"

"But this is important!"

"Say on."

"Is there a yard at the back of this house?"

"No."

"No?" ejaculated Jack, with a tone of disappointment—"no? Are you sure you have no yard?"

"Of course!"

"I hoped you had."

"Why?"

"To escape."

"If there had been a yard, it would have been watched."

"I would have risked that! But tell me, are there not windows at the back of this house?"

"Yes, one."

"Where does it look out on to?"

"A court."

"What court?"

"Great Crown Court."

"Leading out of Wardour Street?"

"The same."

"Capital! That will do!"

"But you cannot leave the house that way!"

"Why not?"

"It will be watched."

"I will chance that!"

"Alas, Jack!" said the landlady, wiping her eyes with her apron—"I feel convinced that you will be captured! You cannot escape!"

"Nay, nay—do not be too sure of that! Dry your eyes, and shew me the way to the window you spoke of!"

"Alas! alas!"

"Do not grieve, now, but be quick! Every moment is of the most vital importance! Lead the way to the window, or I shall have to find my way there myself."

"No, no—I will show you! This way! Ha! What is that?"

The landlady paused suddenly in the passage just outside the tap-room.

A loud knocking at the front door had come upon her ears.

"My foes!" cried Jack, between his clenched teeth. "Be quick, or it will be too late!"

"Come on, then! All is well for a moment—I have bolted the front door."

"I am glad you thought of that. But you must let the officers in; I cannot consent to allow you to get into trouble on my account."

"Never mind me—think only of yourself!"

"Where is the window?"

"There—there!"

"Where?"

"On the landing at the top of the stairs. Quick—quick, for your life!"

Jack Sheppard did not need any incitement.

As soon as he knew where the window was situated, he darted up the stairs at full speed.

Reaching the top, he paused a moment and looked back.

The landlady was still standing at the bottom.

"Open the door," he said; "I implore you to open the door!"

"I cannot!"

"But you must! If you do not, you will excite their suspicions! If you do, I shall escape unsuspected!"

Jack disappeared from the head of the stairs as he uttered these words.

CHAPTER CCCGI.

JACK SHEPPARD MAKES HIS ESCAPE FROM THE PUBLIC-HOUSE IN RUPERT STREET, AND AT LENGTH SUCCEEDS IN REACHING THE LITTLE WOOD.

THE landlady happened to be possessed of a tolerable amount of common sense, as several of her remarks would fully intimate, and fortunately she now saw that the best thing she could do was to obey Jack's commands.

Accordingly, when he disappeared with the intention of escaping from the window, she turned round and walked towards the front door.

The knocking still continued with very great violence.

The police-officers were, doubtless, much enraged that admittance should be denied them.

"Who's there?" asked the landlady, in a shrill voice.

"Is it fire—or what?"

"Open—open!"

"I dare say—to a lot of thieves, perhaps!"

"Oh, that won't do! We are police-officers, and you know that well enough! Open your door! I command you in the name of his most gracious majesty the King!"

"If you are officers, all right enough; I will let you in in a moment."

"Then why did you not do so at first?"

"Because I came to the door as soon as I could."

As she uttered these words, the landlady withdrew the bolts, and the moment she did so the door was dashed open, and the police officers entered in a tumultuous throng.

The landlady shrank back, hoping in the confusion to escape all observation.

But in this she was disappointed.

An officer seized her rather roughly by the arm, and, as he did so, said:

"Come now, don't let's have any more bother, but tell me at once where he is!"

"He? Who?" asked the landlady, affecting, to admiration, not to understand him.

"None of your gammon—I mean Jack Sheppard! It's no good your saying he ain't here, because he is! He was watched in, and it is quite certain he has not left; so what do you say to that?"

"Nothing."

The officer was about to say something in a very angry tone, if one might judge by the expression of his countenance, but he was interrupted by one of his companions, who said:

"Come on—come on! Never mind that old woman—you won't get anything out of her! All she will do will be to hinder you as much as possible, so as to give our man a better chance to escape!"

"You are right! Forward, all of you! But beware!" he added, turning menacingly towards the landlady—"beware!"

"Fiddle-de-dee!"

The house was a small one, and it did not take the officers long to search the ground-floor.

Having done this thoroughly, they ascended the stairs.

Upon reaching the top, the first thing they noticed was a current of cold air.

They rushed towards the window.

It was open.

They looked out, but could see **nothing** but darkness.

The distance to the ground was considerable.

There was nothing to guide them to the conclusion that the prisoner had escaped by this means, save the bare fact of the window being open.

What was below them they knew not, nor was there anything to show how he had accomplished his descent.

Nevertheless, one of the police-officers, in a voice of extreme vexation, said:

"He has escaped! I will lay my life upon it he has escaped! Where on earth does this window lead to?"

"I don't know—and yet it's d—d odd to me if that is not Great Crown Court! If it is, you may depend he has dropped into it, and is far enough off by this time!"

"Follow him, then—follow him!"

"Don't you wish you may get it! I fancy I see myself hopping about with a broken leg!"

"Let us go down, then, and find out where this window really does look on to! You go all of you, and I will

remain at the window, and you will know then whether you have got to the right place."

The others immediately took their departure.

They were greatly chagrined at Jack's escape, for on this occasion they had taken so many precautions, that they made sure of capturing him.

The fact that a window in the back of the house overlooked Great Crown Court had escaped their notice.

They were not long in making their way round, and the one who had stationed himself at the window quickly heard the sounds of their approaching footsteps.

"Hallo!" he cried—"what place is it?"

"Great Crown Court!"

"Have you seen anything of him?"

"Nothing at all!"

"Curses on this chance! I made sure of having him this time!"

"We must hope for better luck!"

"How far is it to the ground?"

"A goodish way!"

Upon hearing this the officer shrunk back, for he had contemplated saving himself the trouble of going round by dropping through the window.

"I think it's very likely he has hurt himself!" said a voice from below—"it's a precious long way to fall, and there's some very orkard stones about!"

"Then there is hope yet!" cried the officer at the window. "If we are quick, we shall perhaps succeed in overtaking him."

There was some slight hope in this, so the officer ran downstairs and out of the house, without troubling about the landlady.

He joined his companions at the corner of Wardour Street.

But here they were compelled to pause in doubt.

There was not the ghost of a trace to show them which of the many turnings the fugitive had taken.

He was already out of hearing, and it was quite madness to think of looking for him in the wilderness of streets of which Soho is composed.

They were obliged to content themselves with the somewhat meagre and unsatisfactory consolation that ere long he would fall foul of some other party of officers.

Leaving them to get over their disappointment as well as they are able, we will turn to Jack Sheppard, who had not got off so easily as it might appear.

Having spoken to the landlady in the manner we have recorded, he dashed across the landing towards the window of which the landlady had spoken, and the position of which was quite apparent in consequence of the dull light that came through it.

To open it was the work of a moment.

He glanced out, and then for the first time he wondered how far it was to the ground.

He regretted that he had been so thoughtless as not to obtain this piece of information from the landlady.

It was no use thinking of that now.

He looked out, and strained his vision to the utmost, in the hope of being able to form some estimate of the distance.

It might be so great as to render a fall from it impossible without sustaining severe injuries.

An uncomfortable feeling came over his heart, and he fancied he was on the brink of some very great danger indeed.

His hesitation was quickly put an end to by the sounds which came from below.

These inspired him with a desperate and reckless kind of courage.

"Better, far better," he muttered, "to risk the fall than fall alive into the hands of the officers. It is my only chance. Ha, they come!"

The officers were now very close at hand, indeed, and Jack had no other resource than to get out of the window.

This he was not long doing, and gradually lowered his body until he hung at the full length of his arms by means of the tight grasp which he kept upon the window-sill.

While in this position he looked down, or rather endeavoured to do so.

But he could see nothing, not even his feet, so deep was the obscurity in which the narrow court was plunged.

With a sickly feeling about his heart, Jack slowly let go his hold.

He reached the ground with great violence and suddenness.

For a moment or so he lay without motion, and almost without sense.

All the breath seemed to have been driven out of his body.

Slowly, however, and painfully, too, he raised himself up.

He was some time in gaining a standing posture. When he did so he became aware that his left foot caused him intolerable pain.

He could scarcely bare to place it on the ground at all.

"I have sprained my ankle," he said. "I suppose I ought to be thankful that it is no worse, as it might easily have been. But what am I to do? I shall be pursued and, I fear, overtaken, for how can I possibly make any speed!"

Jack's position even now seemed to be a very critical one.

He was, however, fully impressed with the importance of removing from the spot where he then was, even if that removal was accomplished at the expense of a very great deal of pain.

Accordingly, he limped off as quickly as he could.

Upon reaching the corner of Wardour Street he paused to reconnoitre, but seeing no one, he hastened off with what speed he could make.

He was, however, rejoiced to find that his ankle was by no means so bad as he first thought it.

The pain had abated, though even now it was excruciating.

Still, he was able to place it upon the ground, and to make use of it.

He found, too, that as he went on using it the better it became, until, by the time he had emerged into the Oxford Road, he suffered only comparatively trifling inconvenience from it.

Still he had a long way to go to reach his destination, and already in the eastern horizon he could discover long beams of grey, misty light, which heralded the approach of the new day.

He crossed the Oxford Road, and breaking through the hedge on the opposite side, struck boldly across the fields.

He took his course almost in a straight line for his destination, only deviating from it when some insurmountable obstacle lay before him and compelled him to do so.

In spite of all his efforts, however, it was fairly daylight by the time he reached the little wood.

Ere he ventured to enter this, he looked scrutinizingly all about him, but without being able to see a single person.

Encouraged by this, he plunged among the trees.

A new difficulty now presented itself before him—one that he had not thought of until that moment.

He had not noticed the tree which covered the entrance to the cave with sufficient attention to enable him to distinguish it from the others.

How, then, was he to find it?

And even then he all at once recollected he should be at fault, for he knew not how to make the inhabitants of the cavern aware that he was on the outside, and awaiting to enter.

CHAPTER CCCCII.

IN WHICH A FORGOTTEN CHARACTER IS RE-PRESENTED TO THE READER.

At this juncture we think we cannot do better than take a glance at the state of affairs in Jonathan Wild's house.

The aspect of things is rather peculiar.

The person who first claims our attention is the thief-taker himself.

Despite the injuries he had received and the excitement he had undergone, Jonathan Wild was slowly but surely getting better.

It was a dreadful moment, however, when he became aware that Blueskin, at the eleventh hour, had escaped from Tyburn.

Nothing would calm his terrible and impotent rage, nor did he grow calm until absolute exhaustion compelled him to be.

It was then that he began to reflect that he was taking very great pains to retard his recovery, and he resolved

that he would, for the future, put a bridle upon himself, and pay greater attention to the advice of the apothecary.

He could not avoid coming to the conclusion that if he had been out and about, these vexatious occurrences would not have taken place.

By this time he told himself Blueskin and Jack Sheppard would no longer have existed as obstacles to his schemes.

It was no good groaning and lamenting about the past, however.

What he had got to do was to remedy the present state of things.

Clearly, then, it was necessary that he should get better—that he should become himself once more.

Then, and not till then, did he feel that his schemes of vengeance would be carried out.

Accordingly he assumed a calmness which he was far, very far from feeling.

Still it was beneficial, and an improvement soon began to manifest itself.

Jonathan Wild made the most extravagant promises to Mr. Snoxall if he would get him well by a certain time.

On such occasions the apothecary, with a view of quieting his patient, would tell him that all was progressing favourably, and that he would soon be well.

Then he would add a caution about the danger of trying his strength too soon.

And so, like a captive lion, Jonathan Wild chafed and fretted in his bed-chamber, though every morning he could tell that he was much better than he had been on the preceding night.

So much for the thief-taker.

We will turn now to another inmate of that gloomy abode in Newgate Street, one in whom it is presumed the reader feels a much greater degree of interest.

We allude to Edgworth Bess.

Poor girl! Hers was an unhappy lot; and yet how happy a one it would have been had fate thrown her in the way of friends who possessed not merely the inclination, but the power to benefit her.

As it was, Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, although their intentions were good enough, in reality did her more harm than good, from the mere fact of their being unable to set about, in a proper manner, the task of effecting her restoration to her rights.

And then, in Jonathan Wild she had a powerful enemy—one who would not scruple to commit any deed, no matter how black, so long as it offered him a chance of effecting his purposes.

Alas! she is much to be pitied, for there appears, at present, no prospect of a termination of her persecutions.

In George Wild, the thief-taker's rascally son, she had an enemy more to be feared than even the thief-taker himself, for, in addition to all the evil qualities which his father possessed, he possessed a large amount of cunning, of which the other was deficient.

Between these two, what chance had poor Edgworth Bess!

In pursuance of the plan of action which he had chalked out for himself, and which his father's illness enabled him to execute with far greater ease and security than he had ever hoped for, George Wild continued to visit Edgworth Bess, and endeavour to persuade her that he was willing to be her friend, and assist her to escape, as well as to put her in the way of recovering her rights.

At first she had felt the greatest possible amount of distrust for George Wild, which feeling would have been invincible had she but known who he really was.

By slow degrees, however, Wild junior succeeded, in a great measure, in removing the unfavourable opinion she had formed against him.

And this is not to be wondered at, for truly was he one who, by his plausibility, would have been able to

"Sugar o'er the devil himself."

George Wild viewed his own progress with very great satisfaction.

The success he had gained did not tempt him into any precipitation.

If anything, he became more cautious than before.

Edgworth Bess at first fully believed in his good intentions, and looked forward to the time when he should come to speak to her with feelings of pleasurable impatience.

Then they would talk over their plans of future opera-

tions, when George Wild would tell her how easily she would be able to obtain possession of the estates.

Then the poor girl's heart would bound with joy, for with wealth at her own free disposal, how much good might she not do to Jack Sheppard and Blueskin.

Somehow or other, she shrunk from speaking about them to her companion.

"Patience—patience!" Wild junior would say, after leaving the poor girl each night, and rubbing his hands together as he spoke—"patience—patience, and I shall succeed! The scheme is almost ripe enough for action, but not quite. A little more patience, and then all will be well!"

Such, then, was the aspect of affairs in that quarter.

But there is another inhabitant of Jonathan Wild's house—one who, as no mention has been made of him for some time, the reader may have forgotten.

That was Steggs.

In him Edgworth Bess had a true and stanch friend—one who would do anything to serve her.

But that unlucky blow which Jack Sheppard struck him while blinded with passion had well nigh estranged him from her for ever.

However, as he lay upon his bed, hovering between death and life, he had ample opportunities of thinking over all that had occurred, and arriving at a correct conclusion upon the subject.

He saw clearly enough that Edgworth Bess was not to blame.

It was absurd to hold her responsible for a blow struck by Jack Sheppard while in such a state of excitement as not to be responsible for his own actions.

He determined, therefore, if he got better, to still continue a friend to her.

It may be that he was influenced in coming to this determination by the bitter hatred which he felt against Jonathan Wild.

It was a hate which could be obliterated in no other manner than by death.

The wound he had received was as near being a mortal one as any wound could possibly be.

But he had escaped injury to any vital part, and though his recovery was very slow indeed, yet he did get better.

Even after his wound had healed over, he was in such a dreadful state of weakness that some time would have to elapse before he would be strong enough even to walk about for any length of time.

We have before stated that the room in which he lay was next to the room which was occupied by Wild junior.

It was divided from it, not by a wall, but by a wooden partition, which had been put up long after the house had been built.

Originally there had been but one room with two windows in it.

This room was divided into two by the partition already mentioned, in such a manner that one window was allotted to each.

The miserable stump bedstead upon which Steggs lay was placed close up against this partition, so that he was able to hear, with tolerable distinctness, all that was said in the adjoining chamber.

This had interested him, and served to pass away more pleasantly many a lonely, weary hour, for he was visited in his sick chamber very rarely, and indeed, had it not been for the thoughtfulness and humanity of Mr. Snoxall, he would have perished.

In such a case, we can easily imagine how gladly he would avail himself of any opportunity of occupying his thoughts.

One day he found, close to the head of the bed, a knot in one of the panels of the partition.

The wood had dried and shrunk from round it, so that now the knot was partly loose.

It occurred to Steggs that if he could remove this knot, he would be able to see as well as hear what took place in the next apartment.

When once this thought took possession of his mind he set to work immediately to try whether the knot could be removed.

He was not long in effecting his purpose.

He took care, however, not to push the knot out into the next room, but to draw it towards him, so that he could replace or remove it at pleasure.

This he succeeded in doing, and then to his great satisfaction he found that the position of the hole was such that he was able to command a view of nearly the whole of the next room.

Wild junior would not have felt very comfortable if he had been made acquainted with the facts which have just been laid before the reader. It happened, however, that he remained without the slightest suspicion of anything of the kind.

Scarcely a night passed without Steggs removing the knot of wood and taking a peep at the interior.

One night he was rewarded for his trouble in a manner that he little dreamt of.

It was the night when Wild, junior, concealed the papers referring to the Donnull Estates, and without the possession of which Edgworth Bess would have great difficulty in establishing her claim.

At first Steggs did not know what these papers could be, but the stormy interviews between Wild junior and his parent, soon let him into the light of it.

He saw the care with which Wild junior secreted these precious documents underneath the floor; and while he was so engaged, Steggs took accurate notice of the exact position of the bit of flooring which he displaced.

"I will have those papers as soon as I am strong enough to take them!" he muttered; "and then I shall indeed be able to revenge myself upon Jonathan Wild!"

It will be seen that he was actuated more by this feeling than a desire to do good to Edgworth Bess.

For several days after the papers were hidden, Steggs made repeated trials of his strength, but he found himself unable to leave his bed.

He was in agony of dread lest the papers should be removed and placed somewhere out of his sight.

This was likely enough to happen, and it was decidedly best to lose no more time than he was compelled.

Wild junior however, seemed to think the hiding-place a good one, for he made no attempt to remove the papers for some time.

CHAPTER CCCCIII.

THE PACKET OF PAPERS RELATING TO THE DONNULL ESTATES IS CONSIGNED TO ANOTHER HIDING-PLACE.

ONE day, a long time after this, Wild junior came into his room and locked the door.

It was the day that had been appointed for the execution of Blueskin.

Steggs heard the door opened, and then locked, and he immediately removed the knot and peeped into the next room.

There stood Wild junior sure enough.

And now Steggs thought the time which he had so much dreaded had arrived.

Beyond all doubt Wild junior was about to remove the papers.

The opportunity which should have been seized was lost, for if he secreted the papers in some other part of the house, Steggs would stand but a poor chance of obtaining possession of them.

No words could portray the amount of anxiety with which Steggs watched all Wild junior's proceedings.

He was in a perfect fever of excitement.

The first words, however, that George Wild uttered, had the effect of reassuring him.

It was a strange habit that, Wild junior had of always half uttering his thoughts aloud when he was alone, though there are few persons who have not at some time or other, caught themselves uttering their thoughts aloud, and we suppose that this habit, like all others, soon increases.

"I have a good chance now!" Steggs heard Wild junior say—"a very good chance indeed! I don't know how it is, but I feel very uncomfortable about those d—d papers. However, I will just ease myself by taking a peep at them now! I need fear no interruption, the governor's safe enough,—ha! ha! ha!"

And this was the way the son expressed himself about the dangerous condition of his father.

Steggs was now considerably relieved, for he fancied that all George would do would be to satisfy himself by a glance that the papers were safe.

Producing the same instrument from his pocket, he

soon raised the piece of planking by its aid, and then thrusting his hand into the cavity he drew forth the packet of papers.

The dust had already settled somewhat thickly upon them, and he knocked the packet on the floor to remove it. "Ah!" he said. "Here they are all safe enough. What a d—d fool I must have been to frighten myself about nothing! Let me see! I wonder, now, whether I had better put them back again, or whether I had better find some other hiding-place."

Wild junior paused to consider this point.

Steggs felt that the crisis had now arrived, and whether he should be able to obtain possession of the papers would be known to him in a very few moments.

"I think I had better put them back," said George Wild, presently. "It's a good hiding-place. The room has been searched once without their being found, and why remove them? I will put them back!"

Having come to this conclusion, Wild junior replaced the packet of papers, and restored the floor to its ordinary appearance.

This done, he left the room again, and Steggs heard him slowly ascend the stairs.

"Now for it," he said—"now for it! I must make the attempt at once. He has his suspicions already, though they are very vague and undefined. There is no knowing, though, how soon he may remove them. If I am not quick I shall lose my chance!"

Steggs was much stronger now than he had been, indeed he thought he was quite strong enough to perform the task which he had set himself.

After mature deliberation, he resolved to wait till night before he attempted the execution of this scheme.

Slowly and wearily the hours passed, until at length the darkness came.

One by one the various noises which could be heard within the thief-taker's residence during the day died away, until all was still.

When he fancied all the house had retired to rest save the two men on the watch in the hall below, Steggs slipped gently out of bed, and hastily put on a few articles of apparel.

Then he stole to the door of the room, and, opening it a little way, listened.

But all was still.

Reassured by the silence which prevailed, he emerged on tiptoe on to the landing, and in less than a moment stood before the door of George Wild's room.

He knew the door was not locked, so he turned the handle, and found it yield easily.

He entered immediately.

His first care was to secure the door, so as to guard against any sudden intrusion; and having done this, he crept on tiptoe, and trembling in every limb, towards the spot where the papers were concealed.

He lifted up the carpet, and then recollected that he would require a tool of some kind to raise the plank from its position.

A long clasp-knife which he had in his pocket would, he fancied, answer this purpose, so he at once made a trial.

The board was not secured in any way; it was newly placed in, so that by using the blade of the knife as a lever, it was easily enough raised.

Poor Steggs felt his heart beat so violently when he found he had successfully accomplished this much of his task, that he could scarcely stoop down to put his hand under the flooring in quest of the packet of papers.

The necessity, however, of being speedy in all his movements gave him strength to master his emotion in some degree.

George Wild was in the habit of visiting his chamber at all hours, and it was impossible to say how soon he might make his appearance.

This was a powerful incentive to exertion, and so Steggs, pressing one hand violently above the region of the heart, sought with the other under the boards.

So well had he noted every movement which George Wild made that he was able without hardly any trouble to place his hand upon the packet.

He produced it with a faint cry of joy.

"At last—at last!" he muttered. "Now, Jonathan Wild, do I indeed triumph! I—poor, weak, crawling thing that I am—have sworn to have my revenge upon

him, and I will have it—a full, a deep, and long-sought vengeance. Nothing will touch him more than the frustration of this the darling scheme of his heart; and I will frustrate it! I have the means of doing so at this moment in my hands!"

Steggs felt his face glow as he muttered these words.

The feeling served to give him an idea of the pleasure he would experience when he had accomplished all his schemes, and when his revenge should have been fully glutted.

Little did Jonathan Wild dream that he had so subtle and dangerous an enemy beneath his roof.

He slept calmly the sleep of false security.

Not for long did Steggs give way to the pleasing anticipations of consummated vengeance.

He would have plenty of time in the solitude of his own room to ponder over the future.

Accordingly he thrust the packet of papers into his pocket, and hastened to replace the board in its original position.

He took care to do this in such a manner that it would not present, even to the keen gaze of George Wild, the least appearance of having been disturbed.

This done, he replaced the carpet and left the room.

As he passed out on to the landing, his ear caught the sound of a footstep on the stair, and this so terrified him that he felt as though he should sink on to the ground.

Summoning all his strength, he darted into his own chamber and closed the door.

But this was all he was able to do.

A sensation of deadly faintness came over him, and he sank powerless on to the floor.

How long he laid there he knew not, but by degrees he recovered his senses, and then he rose to his feet.

All was still, and he believed that no alarm had been given.

He crept towards the bed.

Another anxious question now occurred to him, and it was one that occupied his attention for a long time.

Now that he had got the papers, what was he to do with them?—where was he to conceal them until the time arrived when it would be necessary to make use of them?

He looked all round him, and thought of a dozen different hiding-places.

But there was not one that pleased him—not one that he thought secure enough.

"I have heard," said Steggs, "that the best way to hide a thing is to place it where it will be seen by everyone, and where no one would think it was concealed. I might hide it behind the wainscot, but if the papers are missed, and the least suspicion attaches to me, that will be the first place searched, and they will certainly be found. No, I must think of some better place!"

There was a large cupboard on one side of the fireplace, and towards this Steggs now crept.

He had never looked into it before, and therefore knew not what it contained, or whether it was empty.

Upon this point, however, he resolved to satisfy himself.

He flung open the doors, and, to his surprise, found that the shelves were loaded with books and loose papers of every description.

There was not light enough for Steggs to ascertain the nature of these volumes and documents, but he fancied he had hit upon a place where the packet would be safe.

"I must wait till morning," he said, "and then I shall know better."

With the most intense anxiety that could possibly be conceived, Steggs watched for the dawn of the new day.

He laid down on the bed, with the packet of papers tightly clutched in his hands, and with his ears strained to catch the slightest sound.

The night passed away without any alarm.

As soon as ever there was light enough for his purpose, Steggs arose from the bed and went towards the cupboard.

Opening the door again, he found what he had seen was no delusion.

The shelves were indeed filled with books and papers.

Of the latter some were loose and others tied up in packets and labelled.

The contents Steggs could not very well make out, but

most of them were inquiries from different persons respecting stolen property.

"I have it!" said Steggs. "The packet will now be secure enough, in all conscience, and defy the closest search. I will make it up so as to resemble in all respects the remainder of these packets. A good thought! I will, too, mingle with them several of these loose papers, which, from carelessness or otherwise, have not been tied up like the rest. Then indeed it will be difficult to say which is the packet, without making an examination of them all."

This plan was indeed a most excellent one, and Steggs was not long in putting it into practice.

In a little time he had quite altered the look of the packet of papers concerning the Donnull estates, and, so far as an outward glance went, no eye could possibly have distinguished it from the other packets in the cupboard.

This done, Steggs thrust the precious documents at random amongst the rest, convinced that this was the best way to conceal them should a search be made.

CHAPTER CCCCIV.

BLUESKIN MAKES A STARTLING PROPOSAL TO JACK SHEPPARD.

WE now return to Jack Sheppard, who we left standing in the little wood near Tyburn, quite at a loss which way to turn, and without any idea how he should gain the shelter of the cavern.

He plunged at random into the recesses of the wood, looking closely at each tree as he did so, for he fancied he should be able to recognise it when he saw it.

He soon found this was a great mistake, and he was at length, from sheer exhaustion, compelled to pause and acknowledge himself baffled.

What to do now he scarcely knew.

There seemed to be but one course open to him, and that was to wait in the hope of seeing some of the inmates of the cave.

This was a frail hope, for the "Chickens," as Ned Cattle had called them, were very shy about being seen.

An hour or more passed by, but the silence of the spot was unbroken by any sound, save the chirping of a few melancholy-looking birds on the branches of the leafless trees.

At the end of that time, Jack felt his patience was completely exhausted, and he rose to his feet again, determined to resume his search for the secret cave.

Ere he had gone far, however, he was startled by hearing his name pronounced by a rough voice.

The next moment a man appeared, whom Jack recognised as one of the "Chickens."

He was soon made aware of the difficulty in which Jack was placed, and he led him to the cave without delay.

Upon arriving he pointed out the manner in which he could tell that tree from any other.

He also showed him how to communicate with those below.

This done, they waited a moment, and then the man, seizing the arm of the tree, pulled it down in the same way that Ned Cattle had done, thus disclosing the entrance to the cave.

Jack entered gladly enough, and the tree was made to assume its natural position by the means already described.

As may be expected, Blueskin was glad enough to see Jack Sheppard return in safety.

His long absence had given him great anxiety; and it was at his request that the man who had hailed Jack had gone out in the wood to look for him.

Jack Sheppard was terribly exhausted, and so, almost as soon as he entered, he flung himself down on the hard floor of the cavern and fell into a profound sleep.

He did not open his eyes for many hours, for he was thoroughly worn out.

When he awoke he looked around him, and, to his surprise, saw that Blueskin was the only other inmate of the cavern besides himself.

He looked inquiringly into his old comrade's face, who said:

"You are surprised to find the cavern empty?"

"I am!"

"It is night, and all the men have, I fancy, gone off upon some poaching expedition, leaving me in charge."

"Can it indeed be night?"

"Yes; you are surprised, no doubt, but you have slept almost ever since you arrived."

"I am rested now."

"Come, sit here by the fire. I want to have some talk with you, for during your absence, and while I have been watching you asleep, I have been thinking a great deal about what will be best for us to do."

"And what is the result?" asked Jack, as he seated himself near the fire.

"I will tell you as soon as you have given me an account of your adventures, but not before."

Jack soon told him all that had passed; but as the reader is already in possession of the facts, there is no necessity to repeat Jack's narrative.

As soon as he had concluded, Blueskin said:

"Now, Jack, I have a plan to propose to you, which I think you will consider to be about the most daring that can be imagined by any one; but it has other things besides daring to recommend it."

"No doubt—no doubt. Let me hear it at once. If it is something desperate, it will accord with my humour exactly."

"In the first place, I have been thinking over many things, but most particularly about Edgworth Bess."

Jack was immediately interested.

"I have arrived at the conclusion," continued Blueskin, "that there is but one place where the poor girl can be found, and that is in Jonathan Wild's house!"

"I am of the same opinion myself."

"I feel certain of it!"

"We must rescue her from that place."

"That is the plan I was about to propose to you."

"Go on, then! Speak—speak! Tell me in what way you think her rescue can be effected!"

"Gently, Jack—gently! It will be no easy thing for us to go to the house that stands next door to Newgate; but luckily there is something in our favour."

"What is that?"

"Jonathan Wild is very ill, and confined to his chamber, so that he will not be able to interfere with us much."

"True—true! But what is your plan?"

"Simply this—to make our way to Jonathan Wild's house to-morrow night. You know how we can gain admission."

"Through Newgate Market?"

"Just so! That, I fancy, can be managed easily enough."

"Well, what then?"

"I propose that we creep in stealthily, and gain possession of Edgworth Bess. Then, when we have done that, we will set fire to the house, and take advantage of the confusion that must ensue to escape with her."

"What, burn down Jonathan Wild's house?"

"Just so!"

"That is indeed a daring scheme, but it is one which I would gladly assist to carry out. It would be some revenge!"

"It would—it would! Jonathan Wild, even if he did not perish in the flames, would grieve exceedingly about the destruction of his house!"

"It shall be done, Blueskin! I am glad that such a scheme should have suggested itself to you! To-morrow night it shall be done!"

"There will be time to agree about the means by which we will enter the house when we arrive upon the spot. One thing in our favour is that we are both well acquainted with the interior of the house."

"You especially, Blueskin!"

"Yes, I know every nook and corner in it! When we once gain admission you had better leave the lead to me!"

"I will do so gladly, because you must be better qualified for such a task than myself."

"That is agreed upon, then. And now Jack, there is another point I want to consult with you about."

"Speak—what is it?"

"When we have gained possession of Edgworth Bess, what shall be our next step?"

"Next step?"

"Yes; it requires careful consideration. We are both in a very dangerous condition; and if we don't arrange our plans beforehand, we shall find her a clog on all our movements."



BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ENTERING WILD'S HOUSE.

"I see—I see!" said Jack, gloomily, resting his head on his hands, for he could not see the drift of these remarks.

"What, then, do you propose should be done? If we are once more captured, it will be farewell to all her hopes of gaining possession of that which is rightfully her own."

"It will indeed."

"What, then, are we to do?"

"I am at a loss to know; but you, Blueskin—doubtless you have been considering this point for a length of time, and have decided on some plan which you think had better be acted upon. Have you not done so?"

"I have, Jack."

"Then let me know what you propose."

"I don't know whether you will like the plan, or even whether you will consent to its adoption, and I should have preferred to have had a suggestion from yourself."

"I have not one to offer, and I am impatient in the extreme to hear what you have to propose."

No. 84.—BLUESKIN.

"I will tell you, then. In the first place, we require money, let us do what we may. That difficulty can, however, be easily got over. We shall be able to find enough in Wild's house to put us all right."

"Are you sure of that?"

"About as sure as I could be about anything. I know several places where Jonathan keeps quite a little store of wealth, and we can help ourselves freely."

"What next?"

"When we have done all which we intend, we would hasten with all the speed we could make to the river-side, where we would arrange to have a boat waiting."

"You think that could be managed?"

"Oh, yes; unquestionably! Well, we would get into that boat, and row down the river as fast as we were able."

"But what should you do then? You would be pursued."

"Very likely; but before we had got far down the river, we should be sure to pass some outward-bound vessel, which we would hail, and get on board."

"There are many difficulties in the way."

"I know that; but they must be thought of, and removed. Depend upon it, if we look them steadily in the face, they will disappear."

"Well—well; supposing that, what shall we do next?"

"If the vessel is bound for France or Holland, all will be well—we shall land! The money we shall take with us will enable us to exist, and when affairs are blown over a little, we will come back again. At present, the country is too hot to hold us, and it would be foolish to think of remaining."

"I am afraid we should find more trouble in leaving England's shores than you imagine!"

"Perhaps so; but we must hope for the best."

"I can see my way pretty clear as to rescuing Edgworth Bess, but I confess I don't like the idea of trusting to some vessel overtaking us."

"Nor I, but I could think of nothing else. But yet!—stay! A fresh thought has struck me. I think we shall be able to manage all first-rate."

"How so?"

"It has just occurred to me that Ned Cantle is the man to help us out of this difficulty."

"Indeed! What makes you think that?"

"Merely what I have heard; but we will wait until we can see him, and put the question direct."

"What question?"

"Whether he can assist us to leave England."

"Would you trust him?"

"I feel certain that we could do so with perfect safety. He is willing to be a true friend to us if we will allow him the opportunity."

"And do you really think he could aid us to get abroad?"

"I fancy so. Some conversation which I overheard between him and some of his companions leads me to form the opinion."

"Hark!" said Jack. "I can hear a footstep! Some one comes!"

CHAPTER CCCC.

NED CANTLE SHOWS HIMSELF TO BE AN IMPORTANT AID, AND IS THE MEANS OF SIMPLIFYING BLUESKIN'S PLAN.

BLUESKIN paused instantly, and then both our friends assumed listening attitudes.

Nearer and nearer came the footstep.

By the sound, they could tell that some one was descending the steps that led from the upper ground into the cavern.

In another moment a figure made its appearance.

Blueskin immediately seized one of the faggots from the fire, and held it high above his head, so as to diffuse its beams as far round him as possible.

The ruddy torchlight fell upon the advancing figure, and revealed the form of Ned Cantle.

"All right!" he cried. "Have you had any alarm?"

"No," replied Blueskin, to whom the question had been addressed. "All has been still."

"That is well."

"Have you returned for the night?" said Blueskin.

"Why do you ask?"

"Simply because, if you are not going out again, Jack Sheppard and myself would feel it a favour if you would sit down with us, and give your opinion and advice upon a certain matter."

"No, I am not going out again to-night, and I shall be glad to help you, if it is in my power."

"I quite believe it; I fancied from the first that you were a man who could be trusted, and what I have since seen of you has confirmed me in that belief."

"I am very glad to hear you say as much," replied Ned Cantle, who looked up to our two friends with a very great amount of respect indeed.

"Sit down here by the fire," said Blueskin, "and then we can talk together at our ease."

Ned Cantle complied, and rolling a small cask from one corner of the cavern to the fireside, he sat down upon it, prepared to listen with the greatest intentness to all that might be said to him.

A moment's silence ensued, for Blueskin scarcely knew how to broach the subject.

He resolved, after some consideration, to give him a general outline of their position, believing that in this instance at least a whole confidence was better than a half one.

Having come to this determination, he spoke:

"We have known each other but a short time," he said, "but still long enough for me to feel quite certain of your sincerity. You are willing to stand a friend to us?"

"I am indeed!" returned Ned Cantle, in a tone of voice which showed that he was thoroughly in earnest. "You will never have cause to regret placing confidence in me, though I am afraid I shall never be able to render you any important service."

"Well, that remains to be seen. I will explain to you the difficulty in which we find ourselves placed, and perhaps you may be able to suggest some means of getting out of it."

"I willingly would if I could!"

"Listen, then! In the first place, it is quite certain that, after what has occurred, the sooner we leave England the better it will be for us."

"Do you really think of making the attempt to go abroad?"

"Yes."

"But this cavern will be a secure hiding-place for you."

"I don't dispute that for a moment."

"Then why not stay where you are until the excitement of the people has died away?"

"To answer that question properly I must explain matters to you a little."

Ned Cantle nodded his head.

"In the first place, then, there is a young girl who, by the villany of her uncle, has been deprived of her property and estates. This uncle called in Jonathan Wild to his aid, who got all he could out of him, and when he had learned the precise state of affairs he resolved to have the property himself."

"Just like him!"

"As you say, it was just like him. His first care was, then, to obtain possession of this young girl, and induce her, either by fair means or foul, to consent to aid him in his schemes."

"I understand."

"Had it not been for the exertions of Jack Sheppard and myself, the villainous thief-taker would, beyond all doubt, have succeeded in his plans. As it was, he experienced nothing but defeat, and it is solely in consequence of our having espoused the cause of this poor girl that he has shown so much animosity towards us. He resolved upon the destruction of both of us, and you are already aware how nearly he succeeded."

"I can speak for you, Blueskin, at all events," said Ned Cantle, "for you had a very narrow escape!"

"If it had been much narrower I should not have escaped at all!"

"Go on with your story, I am greatly interested in it."

"Well, we thwarted him, but, owing to our position, we were not able to do just as we should have wished. Had it been otherwise, we should have obtained a victory over him easily enough."

"And what was the result?"

"For some time past it has been a regular struggle between Jonathan Wild and ourselves which should retain possession of her. We have had her, and so has Jonathan Wild."

"And where is she now?"

"That we cannot tell for certain. For a long time past we have lost sight of her, nor have we been able to trace her beyond a certain point. We have reason to believe, however, that she has fallen into the power of Jonathan Wild, and is at this moment in his house."

"And you want to rescue her?"

"Just so! If we could once more obtain possession of her, we would go abroad, and not return to England until she was of age. We should then be more secure."

"But how are you to do this?"

"That is just the point! I will tell you our scheme, and the manner in which we should like you to aid us, and after that you can tell us whether it is in your power."

"I hope it may be! I would assist you with very great pleasure! Go on!"

"Our scheme, then, is to get into Wild's house——"

"Eh?"

"Get into Wild's house!"

"You must be mad!"

"You are astonished at such a daring feat, no doubt; but still, we are resolved upon it."

"But Jonathan Wild's house is next door to Newgate."

"We know that."

"Well, you quite take my breath away! Why, it is the last place I should have thought you would have ventured to, without you wished to ensure your own capture!"

"Quite a mistake! We shall manage that part of the business easily enough. We shall be safe there, because no one would think of looking for us so close to Newgate!"

"Well, there may be something in that!"

"There is a great deal in it! In the event of our accomplishing our purpose, which I need scarcely tell you is to rescue this young girl from Wild's house, we shall want your assistance."

"How can I serve you?"

"Why, when we get out into the open air along with our prize, we shall at once make our way down to the banks of the Thames, choosing the nearest point."

"Yes—yes?"

"Well, here we shall want to have a boat waiting."

"And then you will all three enter, I suppose, and push off from the shore with all the speed you can make?"

"Just so!"

"And what next?"

"We should want to get on board some vessel bound either for France or Holland."

"Ah!"

"And then we should be all right."

"Of course you would."

"You can now perhaps guess what we want you to do. It is, to have a boat in readiness at some point that we will agree upon, and then help to row us off."

"Exactly!" said Ned Cantle, "and when I tell you something more, I think you will be glad that you took me into your confidence."

"What is it?"

"Why, it so happens that I am in a position not only to render you the service you have named, but also a more important one."

"I am glad to hear that. What is it?"

"The plan you have laid is a good enough one, and yet I fear, if you were pursued, as probably you will be, that you would have but a poor chance of escaping capture."

"How so?"

"Because part of your plan is to get on board of some outward-bound vessel, and that you would find a very difficult thing; indeed, I look upon it as an impossibility."

"Do you indeed?"

"I do, and you will perhaps be inclined to attach more value to my opinion when I tell you that the river is well known to me, having been for many years engaged upon it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, a man has often to do strange things, and to tell truth, even now I am connected with the water, and that is what made me say I should be able to render you a further service."

"Let us hear what you have to propose."

"In the first place, then, I may as well say that I will undertake to be in waiting with a boat at any point you may think proper to agree upon."

"Thanks for that! We did not think you would be able to aid us further."

"But luckily I can do so! A particular friend of mine, who would gladly serve me in any way he could, is captain of a lugger which plies between London Bridge and Amsterdam."

"Indeed!" cried Blueskin, exultantly. "That is good news indeed; and where is this vessel now?"

"Lying at her moorings, just below London Bridge."

"Better and better! When does she set sail?"

"I believe in two days' time."

"That is a pity!"

"It is nothing! The time of starting is not absolute. I could arrange for the vessel to depart at any hour you think proper."

"Can you indeed?"

"I think I may safely say I can. The captain is a friend of mine, and entirely master of his actions."

"What does the boat carry?"

"Well, never mind that! I could tell you, of course, but then it is his secret, not mine!"

"All right! It is of no importance!"

"I will tell you one thing, however. If you can once succeed in getting on board that boat, you are safe!"

"How so?"

"You will see in good time. I propose, however, that in the morning I go to London Bridge and see my friend, and make all necessary arrangements with him."

"I should be glad indeed if you would do so."

"Then I will, depend upon it, and when I return I will let you know the result of my mission."

"Good! If you can arrange for the boat to weigh anchor the moment we get on board, and go down the Thames, my mind will be quite at rest, because I have no doubt whatever about our being able to accomplish the other portion of our enterprise."

"I think I could almost promise it to you on my own authority. However, it will be best for me to go and see how matters stand, so as to prevent all possibility of a hitch in the business."

"Certainly, certainly! and as you will pass through the City on your way, take notice of what is going on around you. It may be that you will be able to pick up some important piece of information."

"I shall keep my eyes open, depend upon it!" said Ned Cantle. "Dawn cannot now be far distant, and so with your permission I will lie down and get a little sleep before I set off upon my excursion."

"Do so—do so, by all means!"

Ned Cantle withdrew, and laid himself down in one of the corners of the cavern, where he quickly fell asleep.

Indeed, it was his intention to immediately seek his couch when he had entered the cavern.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard sat for some time talking, and then they followed the example of their new friend.

They had a very important task to perform, and they would require all the strength and endurance they could command, and they were well aware that nothing is so strengthening to the body as a sound sleep.

CHAPTER CCCCVI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD SET OUT UPON THEIR DANGEROUS EXPEDITION, AND SUCCEED IN GAINING ADMITTANCE TO THE YARD AT THE BACK OF JONATHAN WILD'S HOUSE.

THE fortunate fact of Ned Cantle's being acquainted with the captain of a vessel that plied between London Bridge and Amsterdam had the effect of greatly simplifying Blueskin's plan.

Indeed, both Jack Sheppard and himself now looked upon it as perfect.

The only doubt they had had was about being able to get on board a vessel possessing the requisite qualifications, and now that promised to be done easiest of all.

Under such circumstances, we cannot wonder that their sleep should be sound.

How long their slumber would have continued is hard to say, but they were awoken by Ned Cantle.

He shook them rather roughly by the shoulders, and then he said:

"I am off now! I shall not be long away, and during my absence, pray do me the favour of remaining where you are. Do not be tempted on any account to leave the cavern!"

"We promise that readily enough," said Blueskin.

"We will wait here until your return. If you can arrange for the vessel which your friend commands to be in readiness to start at any moment between midnight and dawn to-morrow morning, that will suit us excellently."

"I think that can be done. However, I will let you know when I return. Is there any further commission for me to execute?"

"No—none that I am aware of."

"Then I am off, and you may expect me to re-appear as soon as ever it is possible."

"All right—farewell!"

"Farewell!" said Ned Cantle, and as he uttered the word, he turned on his heel and left the cavern.

It is not our intention to follow him upon his expedition.

He was absent several hours, and during the whole of that time, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard remained in the cavern, anxiously awaiting his return.

They occupied themselves in still further arranging their plans with greater exactness than they had been able to do the night before.

It is not necessary, however, to place before the reader the whole of their conversation on this occasion—it will be sufficient to relate their adventures when they set out.

At length, when the day was very far advanced, Ned Cantle made his appearance.

A glance at his countenance was alone sufficient to inform our friends that he had succeeded in his enterprise.

"All is well!" he said, anticipating Blueskin's question. "I have been able to make the arrangements with even greater ease than I had anticipated."

"That is good news!"

"It had been agreed upon that the vessel should start at dawn to-morrow morning, and if it is necessary, they can easily weigh anchor an hour or two before then."

"Good!—and what more?"

"Nothing, except that I have engaged a boat, and I shall be seated in it waiting for you at Puddle Dock—do you know it?"

"Quite well!"

"It is the nearest point on the river's bank to Newgate, and if you go down Warwick Lane and keep on in a straight line, you will come to it."

"All right! Was there anything more?"

"Nothing, except that the closest possible search is being made after you. The officers are out in all directions, and they are backed up by Jonathan Wild's men."

"I quite expected that."

"And, moreover, orders have been issued by the police authorities that no vessel should leave port without an examination being made; or, rather, I should say the commanders have been ordered not to take anyone on board who is not provided with a certificate."

"We shall be able to dispense with it, I hope."

"Oh, yes; that will not matter!"

"And is that all the news?"

"Yes."

"Then we must wait patiently until night, and when night comes we will set out."

"Agreed!"

Nothing more of any importance took place until Ned Cantle gave Blueskin and Jack Sheppard warning that night was close at hand.

They then set to work to get themselves in readiness for their expedition; and by the time they had done this, it was time to start.

All three set out together, intending to separate when they got near their destination.

They used the utmost caution in their progress.

Up to a certain point Ned Cantle was allowed to take the lead; but when London was reached, Blueskin took his place, because he believed he was best qualified for the task.

They reached the City about an hour before midnight.

This was full early; and, as they had plenty of time to spare, it was proposed by Jack Sheppard that they should all three bend their steps to Puddle Dock, and leave Ned Cantle there.

His object for doing this is obvious enough.

They would then know just where the boat was situated, and be able to jump into it without delay.

A wiser proceeding than this could not have been decided upon, for in the hurry and confusion of their flight it would be an immense advantage to know just where to go.

This was seen at once.

Upon reaching the point he had named, Ned Cantle showed them the boat.

"Now," he said, "when you have been gone an hour, I shall take my seat in that boat, and remain there with the oars in my hands, in readiness to push off, until you come."

"reed—agreed!"

"Farewell, then, for a short time, and good luck go with you!"

In a few minutes afterwards, Jack and Blueskin took their departure, and directed their steps in a straight line towards their destination.

Crossing the top of Ludgate Hill, they made their way up Warwick Lane until the large gateway leading into Newgate Market was reached.

Under this they passed, and in a moment were lost to view in the obscurity with which the market was filled.

Presently they paused, and Blueskin said:

"I have been thinking, Jack, that we shall have to abandon the course of action which we had decided upon."

"Why so?"

"Depend upon it, Jonathan Wild, now that he is aware that we are acquainted with the door leading out of the passage into his yard, has taken good care to secure it in such a manner as will defy all our attempts to force it open."

"What are we to do?"

"Why, first of all, try. It may be that nothing of the kind has been done."

"We will try."

It was at the mouth of the passage which we have so often had occasion to mention that the two friends had paused, and now they hastened along it, and soon reached the door.

As Blueskin had anticipated, it was as firm as a rock.

Their united strength just enabled them to shake it slightly in its frame, but that was all.

But this was more than Blueskin had dared to hope for.

"All right!" he said; "the door is secured on the other side, but only by ordinary fastenings, so we shall be able to remove them. I should say, from the feel of it, that the door is locked, and bolted at the top and the bottom."

"But how are we to open it?"

"I shall have to get you to do that."

"How?"

"Come here, and I will show you. You must get on the top of that wall, and then drop down on the other side."

"All right—I understand!"

"I will help you up on to the top of this stall, and then you will easily be able to get on to the wall."

"So I shall."

One of the butcher's stalls in the market happened to be in immediate contiguity to the wall at the back of Wild's house, and by the means Blueskin had mentioned the feat could be easily performed.

In less than a moment Jack Sheppard was on the roof of the stall.

It was rather a slippery roof, composed of smooth wood planking, which afforded hold to neither hand nor foot.

He slipped alarmingly once or twice, and had a narrow escape from a serious fall, but each time he succeeded in saving himself.

The highest part of the roof, which Jack was endeavouring to gain, reached to within about a couple of feet of the top of the wall.

At last Jack arrived here.

Seizing firmly the top of the wall, he drew himself up by it.

He was very cautious, though, not to expose too much of his person to view at first, for fear some one should be in the yard below.

He peeped over, therefore, and after a stealthy glance or two assured himself that the coast was clear.

Upon this he raised himself still higher.

He was now able to say for certain that there was no one in the yard, so nothing remained for him to do but descend into it.

First of all he looked up at the thief-taker's abode.

The ground floor was plunged in darkness.

From one or two of the upper windows, however, there came faint beams of light, showing that there was some one in them.

A profound silence reigned around, and after one more glance into the yard below, Jack commenced his descent.

He acted very wisely in taking all these precautions.

Should they be discovered, or the least alarm given, the whole of their scheme would be ruined.

The reader will therefore see the necessity of being careful to a fault.

Jack Sheppard had no other means of reaching the yard below than lowering himself by his hands until he hung at the full length of his arms, and then dropping the distance.

This was the course, then, that he adopted.

This distance to drop was considerable, and the yard was paved with large flagstones, which would not be very comfortable things to alight upon.

Shutting his eyes, Jack let go, and reached the ground with great force.

For a moment or two he lay perfectly still.

At first, it was because all the breath was knocked out of his body, and he had no power to rise; and afterwards, when he recovered his senses a little, he lay still to ascertain whether any alarm had been given.

But all was quiet, so he rose to his feet.

The door in the wall was close by, and upon going up to it, he found that Blueskin's conjecture was perfectly correct.

The door was locked and bolted.

The latter fastenings Jack had but little trouble in removing, although they were very rusty.

He forced them back.

The lock, however, was not to yield so easily.

He felt about for the key at first, in the faint hope that he would be able to find it sticking in the keyhole; but in this expectation we need hardly say he was disappointed.

It was a very strong, large lock, but Jack found that it was screwed on to the door on the side on which he then stood.

This at once suggested means for removing this obstacle to their entrance.

Jack took a small knife from his pocket, and with the point of the large blade set to work to remove the screws by which the box of the lock was secured to the door-post.

This was a tedious and difficult operation, and he broke the blade of his knife more than once.

Still he made progress, and this encouraged him to continue his efforts.

Blueskin was on the other side listening attentively.

Although Jack had not spoken a word, he could tell quite well what he was about.

He remained quite silent, being fearful that if he raised his voice he should give the alarm.

CHAPTER CCCCXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN SUCCEEDED AT LAST IN GAINING ADMITTANCE TO JONATHAN WILD'S HOUSE.

JACK SHEPPARD did not hurry himself in what he was about.

He was content to see that he was making progress, and so worked on quietly and silently.

He well enough knew that there was no hurry.

It was just about midnight, and at this hour he could scarcely hope to find all the inmates of Jonathan Wild's house at rest.

While those lights remained at the windows, he would not dream of attempting to effect an entrance.

And this made him more deliberate than he would have been.

It was all for the best that Jack Sheppard acted thus.

Succeeding events will show that the least precipitation upon his part would have ruined all.

At last, however, the box of the lock gave way, and the door was opened.

"You have been a long time," said Blueskin, in a whisper. "I began to lose all patience."

"Hush!" said Jack, in a still lower tone of voice. "Be silent! Look there!"

He pointed as he spoke to the windows from whence the beams of light issued.

"All right, Jack; we can venture to speak in a whisper."

"I daresay we can; but pray be cautious!"

"I will, you may depend upon it. First of all, I will close the door, so that the fact of its being open shall not attract suspicion."

Jack consented, and Blueskin shut the door.

This done, he placed his back against it.

"Come here," he said to his companion. "Stand by my side. In the shadow we cannot possibly be perceived."

Jack saw this at once, and hastened to place himself by his side.

From this position, they were able to gaze up at the lighted windows.

For some time they were silent, and then Blueskin said:

"What do you think now, Jack? Which will be the best way to enter the house?"

"I was just considering the point when you spoke."

"Had you arrived at any conclusion?"

"No."

"Think, then, for the time is drawing near when it will be necessary for you to decide."

"I know that; but first of all I want to know something from you."

"What is it?"

"Have you decided what shall be our first proceeding when we enter?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I will take you to those secret places with whose position I am acquainted, and where Jonathan Wild used to secrete a portion of his enormous and ill-gotten wealth."

"Good!"

"We will stow about our persons as much as ever we can, choosing all the most valuable articles we can find."

"Good again! But this part of our enterprise will require to be conducted with very great secrecy and caution."

"Of course it will! We must be careful in the extreme not to give an alarm, for when we enter we shall have several hours' work to perform."

"We shall unquestionably."

"The point is, in which way are we to make an entrance?"

"We shall have time to decide. In the first place, whereabouts in the house are those secret hiding-places you spoke of as containing the valuables?"

"In various places. The most I should think in the office. You know the place where Wild used to sit at his desk?"

"A little room on the ground floor, with a door opening into it out of the hall?"

"The same."

"Is there any other means of gaining admission to it?"

"No."

"Then it's awkward."

"Very awkward, because of the two men on guard in the hall."

"I should think, however, from what you have just said, that the best means of gaining admission would be by raising the flag-stone and descending into the dungeons."

"So do I. We will try, at any rate, and when we have accomplished so much it will be time to decide upon the rest, for we cannot possibly tell what may occur."

"True; but look, out goes that light! That's a good sign, and—ah! there goes the other!"

It was as Jack had said, and now the back of Wild's house was perfectly dark.

They waited a little while after this in silence, and then they ventured to commence operations.

Gliding stealthily across the yard, they paused as nearly as they could upon the spot where they believed the trap-door was situated.

With the position of this trap-door the reader will be perfectly familiar.

A very brief search indeed sufficed to show them the iron ring by which the flag-stone covering the steps could be raised.

Blueskin seized it with both hands and endeavoured to raise it.

But it remained immovable.

Blueskin exerted his utmost strength.

But in vain.

He might as well have tried to raise a mountain.

"It's a case with that, at any rate," he said, as he raised himself to an upright posture. "Jonathan has taken good care to make the stone secure from the inner side. Doubtless he anticipated that we should attempt to make an entrance into his house by means of it."

"You are right, Blueskin. We ought to have known that at once. He has fastened the trap-door evidently, and you may depend he has done so in such a manner as

to make it an impossibility for anyone to raise it from this side."

"Yes, yes! We must at once abandon all hope of gaining admittance by this route."

"We must indeed. But what are we to do?"

"Hush! do not speak so loud. Come back to the shadow of the doorway again, and let us consider."

Jack obeyed.

"I fear we must give up all hope of entering the office," he said.

"So do I."

"In what other part of the house did you say these secret hiding-places were to be found?"

"In that front room on the first floor where you had your first interview with Jonathan Wild."

"I know it. That will do, I think. There is no one posted there to interfere with us, is there?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Let us try that, then."

"But how shall we enter?"

"Do you see that out-building?"

"Yes."

"Well, we could get on to the roof of that, could we not?"

"Certainly."

"And does not that window just above open on to the first-floor landing?"

"It does."

"Then we will get through that."

"You will have to be very careful. The least noise in that quarter would be plainly audible from the hall below."

"We must be careful. But can you see any better way of effecting an entrance?"

"No—none."

"That is sufficient, then. Come, and if you will assist me I will go first."

"Nay, let me. I am the heaviest, and shall be better able to assist you than you would be able to assist me."

"True; and now let us be as silent as possible, for there is really great danger from being overheard. Do not even speak, without you are really compelled to do so."

"Agreed."

In pursuance of this arrangement not another word was uttered, and Jack Sheppard immediately assisted his comrade to ascend to the roof of the out-building of which he had spoken.

This was by no means difficult.

Having obtained a secure footing on the roof, Blueskin assisted Jack to follow him.

The latter being light and agile easily gained the roof.

Both now crouched down and commenced crawling towards the window.

Without any accident they reached it.

Jack Sheppard was an expert at making a surreptitious entrance into any place, and so he tried his hand upon the window on the present occasion.

It was a very ticklish operation.

If he was so clumsy or so unfortunate as to make the slightest sound, it would be fatal to the success of their scheme.

The mere fact of this was sufficient to make anyone nervous, but Jack never trembled in the least—his hand was as steady as a rock.

He had no other tool than the knife of which we have spoken, and which he had seriously injured in attempting to unscrew the box of the lock from the door.

Nevertheless, with this he succeeded in removing the fastening.

A slight snap announced the result.

The sound struck through Jack's heart like a bullet.

The window creaked open a little way.

Jack Sheppard applied his ear to the crevice in a moment, and listened intently.

"Eh!" he heard a voice say, "What was that?"

Jack felt greatly inclined to reply:

"Nothing!"

But the conviction that this would not answer his purpose came strongly over him, and he did the only thing that lay in his power, and that was to remain silent.

He felt he could do no more than allow events to take their course.

"What was that?" said the same voice again; "I am sure I heard something!"

"Did you?" said the same voice. "What was it like?"

"I'll be hanged if I know, for at the moment I really do think I had just dropped off to sleep, but something woke me!"

"What?"

"I tell you I don't know!"

"Listen, then! Can you hear anything?"

There was a pause, and then Jack heard one of the voices say:

"I can't hear anything!"

"You may depend it's all right, then! It was your fancy!"

"Perhaps it was, but I shall keep my ears open!"

These voices came from the two men on guard in the hall below, and the reason Jack heard so distinctly all that they said to each other was, because the men had to raise their voices to make themselves heard—one being seated near the front door, and the other near the iron grating that covered the entrance to the cells.

Jack waited several moments, but all was still.

The man below who had been awoke by the snap of the window was doubtless listening with all his ears.

This was very unfortunate for Blueskin and Jack.

They could scarcely hope to open the window and get through it without making some slight sound which would now arouse the man's suspicions, but which had he not been on the alert would have escaped notice.

Under these circumstances they had no resource but to wait, though they were in a very inconvenient, dangerous place.

Some time passed, and all continuing to remain silent in the hall below, Jack, by a sign, signified to Blueskin his intention of making an entrance.

Blueskin assented.

With great care and noiselessness Jack opened the window.

In doing this he felt certain he had raised no alarm, and cheered and encouraged with this success, he gradually passed his body through the casement.

At last he stood in safety upon the landing.

It was now Blueskin's turn, and Jack trembled, for he could scarcely hope that his comrade would be able to achieve the feat with the same amount of dexterity as he had.

Blueskin was rather bulky in the body, and as a matter of course was clumsy in his movements.

CHAPTER CCCCVIII.

BLUESKIN DISCOVERS TO JACK SHEPPARD THREE OF JONATHAN WILD'S SECRET HOARDS OF WEALTH.

BLUESKIN, however, on this occasion was not so clumsy as might have been expected, and he got through the window very silently indeed.

Jack Sheppard now fell into the rear, and allowed Blueskin to take the lead, because the latter was best acquainted with the interior of the thief-taker's abode.

Like two ghosts they glided across the landing, and in less than a moment they paused before the door of that room in which Jonathan Wild had so often sat and concocted his diabolical plans.

How strange it seemed for those two men to be standing on such a threshold!

Who would have believed that Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, after all their narrow escapes, and with the officers of justice making close search after them—who would have believed that they would have had the temerity to return to London—to come back to Newgate—to break into the house of Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, situated as it was next door to the very prison?

And yet there they were, as calm, and cool, and self-possessed as they possibly could be.

The interior of Jonathan Wild's house was very silent now, and the slight noise which was produced by Blueskin turning the handle of the door sounded with alarming loudness.

He pushed the door open quickly, being well aware that such was the most noiseless method, as many hinges will creak when moved slowly.

The door opened silently, and Blueskin crossed the threshold.

Jack followed close behind him; and then, with the greatest conceivable care, they closed the door behind them.

So far, then, they had succeeded in their enterprise quite as well as they could possibly have hoped for or expected.

Their next proceeding was to obtain a light.

There was no difficulty about this.

Blueskin took from his pocket a small dark-lantern of exquisite workmanship, which he had obtained from Ned Cantle.

Jack had the means of procuring a light, and the lantern was quickly ignited.

With a curiosity which he did not attempt to repress, Jack Sheppard looked about him.

He had not paid a sufficient number of visits to that room for its interior to be familiar to him.

But Blueskin had seen it hundreds of times, and he said, in the faintest of whispers:

"Come, Jack, we will get this part of our business over as quickly as we can. We have yet much more to do, and we have already consumed more time than I had reckoned for!"

"All right! I wonder what Jonathan is doing just now?"

"Lying in bed, I daresay! He may boast about being made of iron, and all that, but he won't recover from the wound I gave him in a hurry! It was as near fatal as could be!"

"What made you attempt his life?"

"I don't know! I felt a sudden impulse which I could not resist. He had taunted and aggravated me beyond endurance, and the means of having my revenge upon him happening to be within my reach, I availed myself of them."

"Well, if you will believe me, I am glad you did not succeed—I should have been disappointed for life if the rascal had come to any other death than that of the hangman's rope at Tyburn!"

"Don't get on to that subject now, we have no time to discuss it! Just hold the lantern for a moment, and I will show you one of Jonathan's hiding-places for his treasures!"

Jack Sheppard took the light, as requested, and then Blueskin, somewhat to his companion's surprise, placed two of the chairs that were in the room just in front of the fireplace.

"Now, Jack," he said, "get on to that chair, and I will get on to this!"

Full of curiosity and wonder, Jack obeyed.

"Hold the lantern so that the light falls on that picture," continued Blueskin, "and then I shall be able to see what I am about!"

The picture alluded to was rather a large one, in a massive frame, and which hung just over the mantelpiece.

What the subject was they did not trouble to look.

Jack just saw that there were several human figures and a good deal of bright colour, and that was all.

His attention was entirely occupied by his comrade's proceedings.

Blueskin took hold of the bottom portion of the frame and endeavoured to lift it off the hook.

After one or two efforts he succeeded, and placed the picture on the floor.

The wall now presented quite an ordinary appearance.

Blueskin stepped on to the chair again, and passed his hand over that part of the wall which the picture had covered.

He was feeling for some projection.

"Here you are!" he said, suddenly; and then, somewhat to Jack's surprise, a little door in the wall flew open, disclosing a dark-looking place beyond.

This secret door appeared to open into the chimney.

Blueskin thrust his hand and arm through the opening and felt about for some moments.

Then he withdrew his hand, and Jack saw that he held a small wooden box, which was nearly as large as the secret door through which it had to pass.

"Here you are, Jack!" said Blueskin. "Get down, and we will open this box, see what it contains, and pocket the most valuable portion of its contents!"

The box was placed on the table, and the lid was forced

open, but not until after several trials had been made with the knife which had already been so useful.

When the lid was raised, a very pretty sight presented itself.

The box was small, but it appeared to be filled with precious stones of all sizes and colours.

They were unset, having evidently been torn from their settings to prevent identification, for to several of them small shreds of gold were still clinging.

"There is a few guineas' worth here, Jack!" said Blueskin. "We won't encumber ourselves with the box, though! Turn them out on the table, and divide them into two portions. You fill your pockets with one, and I will fill mine with the other!"

This was done in a very few minutes.

The stones were small, and did not occupy much room.

When they were all stowed away, Jack said:

"Now, Blueskin, show us another box like the last, and then we shall do, so far as money is concerned!"

"You are right! But I have taken you to the best place first. If we were in the office, now, it would be a different matter!"

"I think we had better abandon that idea altogether. It is too great a risk, and in attempting to get there we may ruin our plan altogether!"

"I am afraid so, too!"

"Depend upon it, Blueskin, the best thing you can do will be to show me what other hiding-places you know of, and we will make the best of them!"

"Very well. Jonathan had a fancy for hiding his wealth in various places, and there are several more in this room. Come here, and I will show you another."

Blueskin led the way to one of the windows.

In former times it was customary to build windows in a kind of recess, and at a convenient height there was what is still called a window-seat.

They were generally made so that they formed a kind of box, in which different articles could be kept.

This one was so provided, and Blueskin raised the lid.

A quantity of articles of clothing was disclosed.

These were tossed aside until the box was empty.

There were coats and caps, and wigs, and false whiskers and mustaches—everything in fact that was necessary to form a disguise.

When the bottom of the box was disclosed, Blueskin pressed upon one corner of it.

The opposite corner immediately rose, thus showing it to be a false bottom merely.

It was a loose piece of wood, which, however, fitted it closely enough to prevent any suspicion.

Blueskin took it out, and then told his companion to direct the broad beam of light which came from the lantern into the recess which it disclosed.

A number of bags, tied up closely, was revealed.

"Do those contain gold?" asked Jack.

"To tell you the truth, I scarcely know what they contain, except that it is something valuable. Here, take them, and put them on the table. We will soon find out what is inside."

Jack took the bags and placed them on the table.

They were seven in number, and very weighty.

With considerable eagerness one was untied, and its contents poured out upon the table.

They were small masses of gold of all shapes and sizes.

"These," said Blueskin, glancing at them, "are most likely the settings of the stones we have pocketed. The fine gold work, you see, has been rudely beaten up into lumps, so as to defy detection!"

"Then these seven bags represent a considerable sum of money?"

"They do! We will take them! In Holland we shall have no trouble in turning them into coin! You take half and fill your pockets, and I will do the same!"

Jack Sheppard obeyed.

He was, of course, highly delighted with this very successful result of their expedition.

The operation of transferring the golden contents of the bags to their pockets did not occupy much time; and when they had done, Jack said:

"We can still carry a little more. If you can show us another secret hoard, we shall do very well!"

"We shall; for I can assure you what we have already

got would fetch a great deal of money—more, perhaps, than you imagine!"

"I am glad to hear it!"

"In fact, there is no place where such things can be disposed of to so much advantage as in Holland; and that is where we are bound for, you know!"

"Yes, exactly!"

"Well, come here! I know of one more hiding-place in this room, and only one!"

"What does it contain?"

"Gold coin, I think. In fact, it is the place where Jonathan keeps whatever ready money he may happen to have in the house."

"Glorious!"

"Show the light here! The hiding-place is in the panelling of this wainscot."

Blueskin went to one portion of the room, and, by the aid of the light, examined the wainscot narrowly.

"Here it is!" he said. "Here is the spring!"

He pressed upon it as he spoke.

This room—like nearly all the rooms in Wild's house—was fitted with a wainscot which reached about half-way up the walls, and which was wrought so as to represent panels surrounded with massive frames.

CHAPTER CCCCIX.

BLUESKIN SETS FIRE TO JONATHAN WILD'S HOUSE, AND EVENTS BEGIN TO ASSUME A VERY COMPLICATED APPEARANCE.

WHEN Blueskin pressed the spring, the centre of one of these panels slid slowly downward, revealing a small chamber, in appearance not unlike the interior of a modern iron safe, for it was fitted with partitions and drawers.

One of these drawers Blueskin pulled out and handed to his comrade.

It was filled with guineas.

Jack placed it on the table and returned for more.

There were four drawers, each of them filled with loose gold.

In the partitions were several books and other papers.

These they did not trouble themselves with, but emptied the drawers on the table, and filled their pockets with the guineas.

They were now pretty well loaded.

They would have found it difficult to have carried away any more than they had already got without feeling great inconvenience.

"I think we may safely say that we have accomplished another portion of our enterprise!"

"I think so too, and we have not been long about it either!"

"About an hour, I should think."

"Not more."

"If that is the case, we have a good two hours before us; and what we have to do will not, I should think, occupy us more than half that length of time!"

"I should think so too! You reckon the time, then, to be two o'clock?"

"I do!"

"I wish we knew for certain. Hush! What is that?"

"St. Sepulchre's clock!"

"Listen, then, and we shall know the time!"

Jack and Blueskin assumed listening attitudes

The clock struck twice.

"I was near the mark! Now, then, what shall we do next?"

"Fire the house!"

"Before we rescue Edgworth Bess?"

"Yes, certainly! We shall have no trouble in obtaining possession of her, and by that time the flames will have taken firm hold, and amid the smoke and confusion we shall have a much better chance of getting off!"

"All right! Where shall you lay the fire?"

"In as many places as we can, and then there will be less fear of its being extinguished."

"You must take care not to have the flames spread too rapidly, or we shall be destroyed as well."

"Oh, never fear; we shall have plenty of time. Don't waste any more time in talking, but come and help me."

To this Jack consented.

Blueskin gathered together all the combustible articles

he could find in the room, and divided them into four portions.

He put one in each corner of the room in such a manner that, as it burned up, it would set fire to the wainscoting.

When this fairly caught the blaze, the fire would gain ground rapidly.

Having arranged these heaps in a manner that displayed a great deal of skill, Blueskin set fire to them one after the other.

They blazed up quickly.

This done, they left the room hastily, and closed the door.

The most perilous and difficult portion of their enterprise still lay before them.

They had to find the room in which Edgworth Bess was concealed, and to escape with her.

And, after all, they had no conclusive evidence to show that Edgworth Bess was really an inmate of that house.

We happen to know that they were perfectly correct in their supposition.

But even had they been certain upon this point, it would have been no easy matter for them to have decided in which room she was to be found.

Any mistake upon this point would be fatal.

One thing in their favour was the fact of Blueskin being so intimately acquainted with the interior of the house as he was.

Thus he was able to say with precision that she was not in any room on the first floor, because those apartments were otherwise occupied.

He motioned to Jack to follow him up the staircase that led up to the second story of the house.

They reached the top and stood upon the landing without having given the least alarm.

Blueskin put his finger to his lips in token to Jack to remain silent.

That was the floor upon which Jonathan Wild's bedroom was situated.

Without a word he crossed the landing, and ascended the next flight of stairs.

He was closely followed by Jack.

"That danger's over," he said. "You may speak in a whisper now."

"Which is the door?" said Jack.

"Wait a moment!" replied Blueskin. "Let me consider! You see that door yonder?"

"Yes."

"That leads into the room in which I was confined."

"Then she is not likely to be there."

"No; for, if you remember, I removed several of the iron bars that were placed before the windows."

Jack nodded.

"She must be in the next room."

"Do you think so?"

"I do. In fact, I am as sure of it as I well could be of anything about which I had not positive knowledge."

"Let us try, then."

"We cannot do better; I feel sure that is the room."

Blueskin was so lucky as to be quite right.

The room in which he himself had some time previously been confined was the one in which Wild junior had taken up his quarters for a time.

The door Blueskin paused at was the next room to it, and this, as we know, led into the room in which Edgworth Bess was confined.

Although he had said he was so sure, Blueskin felt very uncomfortable when he tapped lightly upon the panel of the door.

What if he was mistaken?

But it was done now.

No notice was taken of this summons for admission; but as he listened, he fancied he could hear the sound of whispering voices.

He thought at first he was mistaken in what he had heard.

But no! The whispering was continued.

Blueskin drew back in alarm.

"What is the matter?" asked Jack anxiously, for he was too far off to hear the whispering sound.

"I am afraid I have made a mistake!"

"The devil!"

"There is no doubt about it! I can hear some one inside whispering!"



THE COMBAT BETWEEN WILD JUNIOR AND THE FUGITIVES.

"Whispering?"

"Yes."

Somewhat Jack felt his blood flush up into his face as he heard this intelligence, though he could not tell why it should do so.

At this moment, however, they heard a footstep.

Then the door was flung wide open.

A man appeared upon the threshold.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard recognised him instantly.

It was George Wild.

There was an angry look upon his face, and he stepped out on the dark landing, as he said:

"What is that? What is it, I say? Speak at once!"

Our friends were silent; but they felt that their discovery was inevitable.

It is probable, however, that in the darkness they would have escaped notice.

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As George Wild stepped out on to the landing, however, his position on the threshold was occupied by another person.

As soon as he saw who the second comer was, Jack uttered a cry and sprang forward.

It was Edgworth Bess who had appeared upon the threshold.

She echoed the cry to which Jack Sheppard had given utterance, and sprang forward to him.

George Wild uttered a horrible curse, and drew his sword.

Blueskin did the like.

Edgworth Bess clung to Jack's arm with passionate tightness.

But he put her on one side, and he too drew his sword.

The reader will scarcely require an explanation of the apparently singular circumstance of Edgworth Bess and Wild junior being in the room together.

In pursuance of that plan of action upon which he had decided, Wild junior had paid her one of those stealthy nocturnal visits, his object being to still further delude and impose upon her.

How far he would have succeeded we cannot say.

The progress he had already made was quite enough to satisfy him.

Edgworth Bess, doubtful at first, had at last learned to put trust in him.

When Blueskin tapped at the door, Edgworth Bess was urging upon her false friend the desirability of embracing their present opportunity of leaving the house.

But Wild junior, whose plans were not yet ripe, combated her arguments in the best way he could, and persuaded her to remain, at any rate, a day or two longer.

The faint tapping at the door had discomposed both of them.

Wild junior knew not what to think of it, and for probably the first time in his life hesitated what he should do.

He whispered to Edgworth Bess and told her there was danger.

Then he fancied he must have been deceived by some slight accidental noise, and so he flung open the door in the manner we have recorded.

Being under this impression, it is probable that he would have retired into the room again without having perceived our friends, had it not been for the effect which the appearance of Edgworth Bess produced.

Wild junior had his failings, but cowardice was not one of them.

Although he was singly opposed to two men, who he well knew were about the most desperate characters that ever existed, he did not hesitate to attack them.

Their blades rang together with a clashing sound.

Jack Sheppard fought at a disadvantage.

Edgworth Bess clung tightly to him, and prevented him from moving with freedom.

And not only that, but he was terribly alarmed for fear she should receive some injury.

The din made was truly terrific.

The whole of Jonathan Wild's household would quickly be aroused, and our friends would find it difficult, if not impossible, to escape.

Moreover, there were palpable signs that the fire had already made alarming progress.

Up the staircase, as up some huge chimney, there came dense volumes of curling smoke.

The air, too, that was around them grew rapidly hot.

Through the crevices in the flooring the smoke came and the heat too.

The fire had, indeed, made much more rapid progress than Blueskin had calculated upon.

The materials he had accumulated were of a very combustible character, and they had given out a great quantity of flame.

This had seized upon the wainscot, which being old was exceedingly dry, and it burned like so much tinder.

In less than ten minutes after they had left that room on the first floor the interior was just like a raging furnace.

Of course the flames spread to the adjoining chambers; and now, while the terrific combat between Wild junior and his two assailants was taking place on the landing, the fire continued to spread and to take a firmer hold upon the building.

Still the swords clashed furiously.

Wild junior bawled out at the top of his voice for assistance.

But no one appeared to take the least notice of his cries.

A confused roar of many voices came faintly upon his ear, and that was all.

And still the smoke continued to pour up the staircase in ever-increasing quantities.

CHAPTER CCCCX.

FERILS AND DANGERS THICKEN ABOUT THE FUGITIVES
IN THE THIEF-TAKEN'S ABODE.

HAD Wild junior happened to have been possessed of fire-arms, he would certainly have inflicted some severe injury upon his assailants; but he had nothing but his sword, and with this he laid about him with right good will.

He was perfect master of the use of his weapon, and his attack was characterised by great impetuosity, so that our friends were fully occupied in warding off his blows.

Jack had pistols in his pockets; but he could not get at to use them.

Blueskin, too, was similarly provided, and with his left hand he felt in his pockets for one, and cocked it.

This, however, was not done in a moment.

It was no easy thing to do while his right arm was so fully occupied as it was, and while it was necessary that the whole of his attention should be directed elsewhere.

At last, however, the pistol was cocked, and he rapidly brought the weapon to a level, and pulled the trigger.

A blinding flash and a loud report instantly followed.

The discharge of the pistol mingled with a shriek of agony that came from the lips of Wild junior, who, with that awful cry, fell gasping to the ground.

It was rather too bad, but we could scarcely expect that Blueskin would be over gentle with one who had taken such pains to make himself their implacable enemy.

Besides, their situation was so desperate that it could only be improved by some desperate act.

"Now!" cried Blueskin, as soon as he witnessed the result of his shot. "Quick, Jack—quick! There is yet hope for us if we are quick."

"Lead the way, then," cried Jack Sheppard, "and I will follow with Edgworth Bess."

Blueskin did not hesitate a moment, but rushed towards the head of the staircase.

But the smoke by this time had increased so much in density that he was compelled to retreat.

Not only was the smoke pungent, but it was scorching-hot, like the air in the interior of a furnace.

His heart sank within him, for now it seemed as though they were doomed to perish in the flames which had destroyed the building and seized upon every piece of woodwork with a rapidity that was awful in the extreme.

Edgworth Bess was almost swooning with affright, and had it not been for the frantic manner in which she clung to Jack's arm, it is probable she would have sunk to the ground.

She gave herself up for lost.

She was sickened and horrified, as well as frightened, by the combat which had just terminated.

The sudden death of the person she had looked upon as a deliverer and friend filled her with horror.

"What is to be done?" said Jack, whose pale face showed how anxious and alarmed he felt.

"We must descend."

"Impossible!"

"It is our only chance. You must cover your mouths closely so as to avoid the smoke, and descend the stairs with as much swiftness as you possibly can."

"Go on, then."

"Now, quick—follow me! There seems to be a lull in the smoke for a moment. Quick—oh, quick!"

With his drawn sword in his hand, ready for instant use, Blueskin precipitated himself down the staircase.

Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess followed.

But as for the former, he almost had to carry his companion down.

In another moment the landing was reached.

Here the fire was raging with the utmost fierceness, and Jack and Blueskin were literally blinded with the flames and smoke.

Just as their feet touched this landing, a demoniac howl came upon their ears.

Well—too well—did they know from whom that awful sound proceeded.

There was but one human being capable of it.

It was Jonathan Wild.

In another moment he came in sight.

He was attired hastily and partially.

His countenance was red with passion, and his eyes were bloodshot with angry rage.

In one hand he held his ponderous hanger, and in the other a pistol.

"Yield, villains!" he shrieked; "yield, or I fire! Yield, I say!"

Blueskin sprang forward.

He saw Jonathan was levelling his pistol, and so he struck the barrel upwards with his sword.

He was only just in time.

Wild's finger was on the trigger, and he was in the very act of pulling it, so that he could not stop.

Bang it went, and the couple of bullets with which it was charged lodged themselves somewhere in the ceiling above.

Exasperated beyond all measure at this failure, Jonathan Wild sprang forward, uttering another howl.

He waved his long heavy hanger around his head as though it had been a straw.

He was determined to sweep all three of our friends from the face of the earth.

He seemed totally heedless of the great danger he was in from the fact of the fire raging so fiercely.

It is probable that in his excitement and rage he was quite oblivious of it.

Rushing to the stair-head, as though to cut off all retreat, he waved his sword, and again called out to them to yield.

But Blueskin saw that Jonathan Wild was alone.

In all probability the other inmates of the house had made their escape from it.

Blueskin therefore attacked Jonathan Wild with great vigour and resolution.

We must pause here a moment to give a few particulars concerning the thief-taker, in order to remove all singularity from his sudden appearance on the landing.

While Jack Sheppard and Blueskin were entering the house, and pillaging it of its most valuable contents, Jonathan Wild was sound asleep.

Since he had made up his mind to be more quiet, he had got better very rapidly, and Mr. Snoxall was soon able to pronounce him out of danger.

But the apothecary feared that some night or other Jonathan would get up when he had no business to do so.

To guard against this, he had been in the habit of administering to his patient a rather powerful narcotic, which caused him to sleep soundly until the apothecary arrived in the morning.

To remove the depression which the opiate caused, a small quantity of cordial was given, which used to have such a pleasant effect upon Wild that he always clamoured for more.

On this particular and eventful night, then, he lay plunged in one of those deep artificial slumbers which would require something extraordinary to break.

It so happened that the room in which the thief-taker slept, being, as we have already stated, in the front of the house, was immediately over the room which Blueskin and Jack Sheppard had set on fire.

The flames ascended, as flames have a tendency to do, and very soon made Jonathan Wild's bedroom most unpleasantly hot.

Still Jonathan Wild slept on.

First came the smoke, and it was a wonder that this did not suffocate him.

It would have done so had it not been for the fact that the flames soon broke through the floor of the room and the smoke made its way upwards.

It was not until a long tongue of flame had licked Wild's face once or twice that he awoke, and then, uttering a howl of pain and fear, he sprang out of bed.

But his position was not much improved, for the beads were almost red-hot with heat.

Although his faculties were so clouded, Wild comprehended the exact nature of his danger.

He knew that the house was on fire, and that if he wished to escape a horrible and painful death, he would have to exert himself to the utmost.

It was just at this moment that there came upon his ears the sound of the conflict that was taking place on the landing above.

He listened, and could hear his son shouting frantically for assistance, his voice making itself heard above the roar of the flames and the clashing of the steel.

Then, somehow or other, there seemed to flash into Wild's mind just what had occurred.

Something seemed to tell him that Jack Sheppard and Blueskin were above, attempting to rescue Edgworth Bess, and that his son George was doing his best to prevent them.

At this moment he reeled and almost fell.

Then, all at once, he thought of the bottle containing

the cordial, a few drops of which always had such a marvellous effect upon him, making him feel like a new man.

He knew where this bottle was kept, and he seized it and drew the cork.

The next moment the bottle was to his lips, nor did he remove it until every drop had been drained out.

The dose was almost too much for him, for the cordial was a very strong one, and only fit to be taken in very small quantities.

Suddenly, however, Jonathan felt his blood circulate like lightning through his veins, and at the same moment he experienced a really wonderful accession of strength.

He slipped on his clothes in a very imperfect manner, and armed himself.

Then he sallied forth on to the landing.

Just as he did so, the three fugitives descended.

The fiery redness of his face was no doubt in a great measure produced by the cordial he had drunk.

He felt that he had the strength of a thousand men, and that he could single-handed keep a whole army at bay.

About his own fate he appeared to be quite heedless.

And so, intent upon their destruction, and maddened with the liquor he had drunk, Jonathan Wild stood at the head of the stairs, determined to bar their passage.

The smoke and flames rolled up in incredible quantities.

The stairs crackled, and the woodwork was already consumed to a dangerous extent.

But this he cared not for.

It almost seemed that he had made up his mind that he would rather perish with them than that they should escape.

Blueskin, however, knew the extent of his danger, and determined not to be stopped by one man, even though that man was Jonathan Wild.

So with his sword he attacked him fiercely, and pressed upon him.

Wild would not give way.

To have retreated a step or two would have been equivalent to a defeat, for if his adversary was on a stair above him he would in consequence have a wonderful advantage over him.

And so from these reasons Wild preserved his ground manfully, and would not budge an inch.

How the contest would have terminated, and when, is very hard to say, had not Jack Sheppard come to the assistance of his comrade.

He drew a pistol from his pocket, cocked it, and pulled the trigger.

But the weapon flashed in the pan.

Jack uttered a curse, and under the impulse of his rage he flung the undischarged pistol into Wild's face.

Jonathan saw the missile coming, and tried to avoid it.

In doing this, he gave Blueskin an advantage which that individual instantly availed himself of.

Striking the thief-taker's sword upwards with his own blade, Blueskin doubled up his fist and struck Wild a tremendous blow on the breast with his left hand.

Wild stood on the topmost stair, and he tottered.

Another blow, delivered nearly in the same place, completely overbalanced him, and with a shriek and a crash he fell headlong backwards down the blazing staircase.

CHAPTER CCCCXI.

JONATHAN WILD MAKES SUPERHUMAN EFFORTS TO PREVENT THE ESCAPE OF THE THREE FUGITIVES.

"THAT is done!" said Blueskin, as he drew back a step.

"What a frightful fall!" said Jack, with a shudder.

"What shall we do now?"

"Descend—descend!"

"How is it possible?"

"We must either make the attempt or stay here and be burned to death. If we can reach the landing window on the floor below, all will be well!"

"We should have a chance of escape then; but, alas! I fear it is impossible to descend!"

"We must try, I say! Quick! This is our only chance, so waste no more time in conversation; we shall never have a better opportunity than we have now! Quick, I

say! Cover your faces as well as you are able, to avoid the heat and smoke!"

Blueskin uttered these words with great energy, and he set the example of acting upon his instructions.

But it seemed nothing short of utter madness to attempt to descend that blazing staircase.

It was like taking a leap into a furnace.

The balustrades were blazing in many places, and the stairs themselves crackled with the tremendous heat.

Seeing Blueskin make the start, Jack followed, though Edgworth Bess, who was half dead with terror, and who only partially understood what was going forward, shrank back alarmed.

Blueskin, however, by his example inspired them with courage, and, covering their faces as he had directed, they followed him.

But not only did they have to pass through a perfect atmosphere of flame, but the stairs felt red-hot, and crumbled beneath their feet.

Never was that staircase descended with more rapidity than it was by the three fugitives.

Blueskin, of course, reached the bottom first.

But as he trod upon the last few stairs he felt them give way beneath him, and his heart quaked for those who were behind.

Down came Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess with marvellous swiftness.

But, to his horror, Jack felt the fourth or fifth stair from the bottom giving way under him.

That was an awful moment.

His arm was tightly clasped around his companion's waist, and, pressing her still closer to him, he gave a terrific leap on to the landing.

That leap unquestionably saved both their lives.

Even as their feet left the stairs, they fell with a terrific crash.

A shower of sparks shot up, and for the moment the flame appeared to be subdued.

But soon it burst forth with redoubled fury, and then the remainder of the staircase was a pit of fire.

Jack and Edgworth Bess both fell when they reached the landing.

They quickly recovered their feet, however, and in doing this they were assisted by Blueskin.

The three fugitives, half suffocated and half scorched as they were, cast around them terrified glances, for even then they were doubtful whether they should be able to make their escape.

Blueskin soon espied the window, and towards this they hastened.

To open it took but a moment.

Blueskin was the first to scramble through.

Then, standing on the shed as securely as he could, he held out his arms for Edgworth Bess, and lifted her out, calling aloud to Jack to follow.

Nothing loth to obey this order, Jack sprang on to the window-sill; but, as he did so, he heard a roar behind him.

At the same time, some one seized him with a powerful grasp, and dragged him back into the burning building.

Jack conjectured at once that his assailant was no other than Jonathan, who, by something little short of a miracle, had escaped from the consequences of his fearful tumble down the stairs.

Both rolled to the ground.

Jack grappled with his foe, and then he found that his conjecture was verified, and that he was struggling with the thief-taker.

Over and over they rolled, getting into frightful proximity to the roaring pit of fire which marked the spot where the staircase had been.

Jack's hands and face were burnt dreadfully.

He could feel his hair singe with the intense heat.

He would have been suffocated by the dense smoke had his face not been so close to the ground as it was.

Ere long, Jack felt that he had the advantage of his adversary.

Jonathan Wild was weak and exhausted.

By a sudden effort, Jack disengaged himself from his grasp.

When he had done this, he did not wait to do any more, but bounded to the window, under the belief that in less than another minute the roof would fall in.

No person who was in the building when that catastrophe occurred could possibly escape with life.

Jack reached the window, and got through it this time without any hindrance.

Under the full belief that Jack would follow close behind him, Blueskin had, without delay, assisted Edgworth Bess down the sloping roof of the out-building, and had finally enabled her to reach the ground.

Half a dozen steps took them across the little yard to the door in the wall which opened into the passage leading into Newgate Market.

This door, the reader will remember, had been closed, but not fastened.

Blueskin pulled it open immediately, but as soon as he got inside the passage he paused.

For the moment they were out of danger.

Their escape up to the present was something wonderful to think of.

But it encouraged them to make still further efforts for freedom.

Turning round, Blueskin missed Jack for the first time, and wondered what had become of him.

He apprehended the worst, and was about to return to the window from which he had just escaped when he saw Jack make his appearance.

Jack Sheppard rolled down the roof of the little out-building with great precipitation, and had it not been for Blueskin he would have had a serious fall.

He was saved this, and then his comrade said:

"Quick, Jack! Let us fly! So far all is well, but the sooner we reach the river-side the better. Come—forward, forward!"

"Hush!" said Jack, as he paused near the entrance of the passage. "Hark! What is that? It is the roof!"

A confused, roaring, splitting sound had made itself heard, and caused Jack to give utterance to these words.

Then there was a loud explosion, followed instantly by a crash.

The roof of Wild's house had fallen in.

The fire had reached its climax.

High up into the air flew the sparks and masses of burning materials, which soon after fell black and charred upon all objects in the vicinity.

As their eyes were fixed upon the upper portion of the building when the roof fell in, the fugitives did not notice a dark figure that crawled out of the open window on to the roof.

Tremblingly that dark figure cowered down until it lay flat upon the tiles.

It seemed to be gasping for breath.

The fugitives gazed with admiration on the column of bright fire that shot high up into the heavens, illuminating everything with wonderful distinctness.

It was by the aid of this bright light that the fugitives perceived, and all three at precisely the same moment, the dark figure lying at full length upon the tiles.

Just then the figure raised its head.

It was Jonathan Wild.

But his hideous features were so disfigured with smoke and so scorched with the heat that none but those who knew him very intimately indeed could have recognised him.

Gradually, and, as it seemed, painfully, the bleeding, blackened man raised himself up.

The eyes of the fugitives were fixed upon him in a kind of fascination, which they found it impossible to resist.

The glaring eyes of the villainous thief-taker were plainly visible as he rolled them horribly around.

He licked his scorched and bleeding lips with his parched tongue.

How he had escaped from the fire, or how he managed to get upon the roof, the fugitives knew not.

Truly did Jonathan Wild seem to have as many lives as a cat.

We can only account for his numberless wonderful escapes upon the supposition that he was destined to die by the hangman's rope.

There is a very old proverb which is still extant, to the effect that "he who is born to be hanged can never be drowned."

In Jonathan Wild's case it would seem that he who was born to be hanged could not possibly perish in any other way.

With a slow and painful movement, the thief-taker began to make his way down the tiles.

As soon as they saw this, the spell which had fixed the eyes of the three fugitives upon him was removed, and they turned round and fled.

Blueskin led the way, leaving Edgworth Bess in charge of Jack Sheppard.

Ere many minutes had elapsed, they emerged through the gateway into Warwick Lane.

The roar of the people in the contiguous thoroughfares came with increasing plainness on their ears.

They hurried off down the street in the direction of the river.

Ere they had gone far, however, Jonathan Wild crawled out into the first-mentioned thoroughfare.

He had guessed the route the fugitives had taken.

The open air revived him, and the cordial he had swallowed began to re-assert its influence.

He moved more quickly.

Reaching the lowest part of the roof, he gradually lowered himself, and attempted to hold by his hands while he dropped the distance.

But his strength was insufficient for this purpose.

He reached the yard with such force and suddenness as to deprive him of breath for a minute or two.

But all the while he did not lose sight of the idea that those three persons whose capture he so much desired were getting further and further away from him.

It was this thought which enabled him to rise to his feet and stagger along the passage and through the market until, as we have stated, he emerged into Warwick Lane only a few minutes after our three friends.

Wild was forced to cling to the iron gates for support.

The cool night air fanned his brow.

He passed his hand over his forehead, as though by that process he could clear his faculties a little, and then, with a grin of satisfaction, he fumbled in the breast of his coat.

After a brief search, which would not have been so long as it was had he set about his purpose in a cooler manner, Jonathan produced a large whistle which he always wore in a little breast-pocket in his coat, to which it was secured by a short steel chain.

Placing this whistle to his mouth, he collected all the breath he had in his body, and blew into it.

A shrill blast followed.

He repeated the summons again and again, and then he had the satisfaction of hearing the trampling of many feet.

Directly afterwards, he saw several persons approaching him.

Two were his own men—the others, officers of the regular police and a few ragamuffins.

Wild blew the whistle again.

The sound guided those who were approaching, and they quickened their steps.

But when they saw the black, bleeding, charred, and half-dressed figure clinging to the iron gates, they one and all recoiled aghast.

CHAPTER CCCCXII.

STEGGS FEARLESSLY PERILS HIS LIFE TO PRESERVE THE PAPERS RELATING TO THE DONMULL ESTATES.

JONATHAN WILD BLEW HIS WHISTLE AGAIN.

Then the men who had drawn back recovered themselves a little, and with a feeling of great curiosity they pressed forward.

The thief-taker recovered himself somewhat, and then, with some of his old manner, he said, or rather shrieked:

"A thousand pounds—a thousand pounds—a thousand pounds reward out of my own pocket to anyone who will capture them, alive or dead! Quick—quick! That is the way they went—down towards Paternoster Row! Are you all idiots, that you stand stock-still? A thousand pounds, I say! Capture them alive or dead!"

"Capture who?" cried everybody in a breath.

"Jack Sheppard, Blueskin, and a young girl!" shrieked the thief-taker, making a wry face every time he pronounced the names of his hated opponents. "After them, or you will be too late! Down towards Paternoster Row they went!"

No more was needed.

Yelling, shouting, and screaming like so many fiends,

away went the whole of the crowd at the very top of their speed, being stimulated to the utmost by Wild's promise of so large a sum.

The thief-taker got better.

He was satisfied now that he had done something, and he wiped his reeking face with a contented air.

"I shall have them yet," he muttered, with fiendish joy—"I shall have them yet! Curse this weakness, I can scarcely stand! How glad I should be to follow them!"

At this moment a man made his appearance, running down the lane.

As soon as he saw him, a fresh thought darted into Jonathan Wild's mind, and when the man was near enough to him for it to be effective, the thief-taker gave vent to a horrible kind of howl.

The man stopped short, as though he had been arrested by some magical process, and then seemed as though he was about to start off again.

His face was the picture of the most absolute and ridiculous fright.

But Wild spoke, and though the tones of his voice were discordant in the extreme, yet the man stopped and listened.

One magic word reached his understanding.

"A guinea," Wild had cried—"a guinea for a hackney-coach, if you have one here in two minutes!"

Never had that man run so fast as he did then.

It so happened that there was a hackney-coach close by, and he fairly earned his guinea.

"Where to, sir?" asked the jarvey, as Wild, with many hideous groans, scrambled into the vehicle.

"Go on down the lane," he said, "towards Paternoster Row, and keep behind a crowd of people you will see a little way ahead. Follow them wherever they go, and keep as close to them as you can. You shall be well paid."

"All right, sir!" said the coachman, who whipped his horses until they started off at a half-gallop.

He was inclined to think his fare would be liberal because he had seen him give a guinea to the man who had played the part of waterman.

Jonathan Wild, although he quite despaired of being able to take any active part in what would presently happen, yet determined to be an eye-witness of the scene.

He hoped to be, like some general on the battle-field, able to give his orders at the proper moment when anything required to be done.

For a brief space, however, we must leave Jonathan Wild and the three fugitives, and the troop in pursuit, while we return to the burning house, and describe what happened there.

If Blueskin and Jack Sheppard had had the least idea that the papers which were so vitally important to Edgworth Bess were concealed in a cupboard in Wild's house along with a quantity of other documents, we feel quite sure that the last thing they would have thought of doing would be to set fire to the house.

Yet this was precisely what they had done.

Already at some length have we described the fearful havoc wrought by the destructive element.

We have seen how things the most substantial fell a prey to the flames, and how could a packet of unprotected papers escape?

Besides, the roof had even fallen in, and after that, what hope would there be of recovering the precious documents from the blazing ruins?

Without them, Edgworth Bess would find it a very difficult matter indeed to substantiate her claim.

Perhaps she might never succeed in doing so, although she tried her utmost.

But if she had those papers in her hand, all would be comparatively easy.

The reader will remember how Steggs became acquainted with the secret hiding-place in which Wild junior had stowed these very papers.

He will also remember how, with a very great deal of cleverness, Steggs had concealed the packet in a cupboard in his room, along with a mass of other papers the property of Jonathan Wild.

Here they would doubtless have remained untouched and secure until the moment he wanted them, had it not been for the fire.

When that took place, the cupboard became the most

dangerous of all the places in which they could possibly be.

Like almost everyone else in the house that night, Steggs was asleep, and little dreaming of his danger.

In obtaining the papers too, he had somewhat overtaxed his strength, and now, as a natural consequence, he was exhausted.

On this night then, and from the cause just named, he slept more heavily than usual, for this was the means which Nature took to restore herself.

Like Jonathan Wild, almost the first thing he heard was the clashing of steel.

But as the combat took place much nearer to his chamber than to the thief-taker's, he heard all with a much greater degree of distinctness.

Then he became conscious that the room was full of dense, suffocating smoke, and he inhaled so much of the vapour that he almost lost his senses.

Indeed, he did fall heavily to the floor, but as his mouth was downwards he recovered, for near the ground the air was cooler and freer from smoke.

By the time he was able to rise to his feet the noise of contention which had been going on outside had ceased.

This, however, he scarcely noticed.

When he made the alarming discovery that the house was on fire, the first thing he thought of was the papers belonging to the Donnull estates.

These he resolved to save and preserve, even if it cost him his life.

Should they perish in the flames, there would be an end to all his hopes of obtaining a cherished revenge upon his mortal enemy Jonathan Wild.

This revenge he could not possibly forego.

Accordingly, then, as soon as he gained his feet, he staggered across the room towards the cupboard, and flung the door open.

Dimly and faintly the contents of it presented themselves to his view.

"Let me think!" he murmured, as he clasped his hands over his brow. "Let me try to recollect, if I can, the exact spot where I placed that packet of papers!"

This baffled his powers of recollection.

As we have stated, he had thrust it in along with the others quite at random.

All he could do was to place himself as nearly as possible in the position in which he had stood on the occasion referred to, and put forth his hand.

This he did, and took hold of a packet, which he drew forth.

And now he found himself in another difficulty.

There was not light enough in the room for him to ascertain whether the packet he had taken hold of was the one he was so anxious to preserve.

It would not do to leave with any doubts upon this subject, nor would it do to linger where he was.

The air in the chamber was becoming insufferably hot, and the floor almost blistered his feet as he stood upon it.

But he did not experience so much discomfort from the smoke as he had done.

The reason of this was simple enough.

The dense vapour was making its way upwards.

The flames were approaching the floor.

Looking down, Steggs now perceived between the crevices of the boards, long, bright, shining lines of light.

Another moment, and the flames burst through.

There was now no lack of illumination.

Every object became clearly and distinctly visible, even as though shone upon by the noonday sun.

It now became a very nice question to know how long the floor would be able to support his weight.

Perhaps a few seconds only.

If it gave way, he would be precipitated into a pit of fire.

Already he could feel his skin dry and shrivel up, while his clothes became reduced almost to tinder.

Still he flinched not, but used every effort to ascertain whether the packet he held in his hand was the one he required.

A searching examination convinced him it was not the right one, and he flung it into the flames with a feeling of angry vexation.

But he did not despair.

He thrust his hand again into the cupboard, the contents

of which he expected every moment to see burst into a flame.

Another packet was produced.

He took it as nearly as possible from the same place.

How much he regretted now that he had not been careful to place the packet just where he could lay his hand upon it!

But, then, who could have foreseen such a contingency as the present?

There was something about the look of the packet that made Steggs think it was really the one that he wanted.

A second glance convinced him that he did indeed hold within his grasp his priceless treasure.

There could be no doubt upon the point, for the bright firelight revealed all.

He hastily thrust the packet into his breast, taking extreme care to do so in such a manner that it would be perfectly safe, and then he looked about him for some means of providing for his own security.

A sudden accession of light filled the room.

The papers in the cupboard had all burst into a blaze, as he fully expected they would do.

Looking across the room, as well as the blinding glare would permit him, he strove to look for the door.

He could just see it.

But it seemed an utter impossibility to reach it.

The boards in the centre of the room were neither more nor less than red-hot, and, by their flaky appearance, it seemed as though they would sink and give way beneath the slightest superincumbent weight.

It would be madness to think of reaching the door, and then, even if he did, he questioned whether his position would be any better.

Close to the cupboard, near to which he stood, was the window.

He had not thought of this as a means of escape, because of its great height from the ground.

But now he was forced to it.

One step took him to this window.

It was a latticed casement, and he flung it open with ease.

The moment he did so, his ears were greeted with a loud shout.

He had been perceived by the crowd below.

Steggs climbed out on to the sill.

A cry of horror and alarm saluted him.

What to do now he knew not.

To drop into the street, which was an awful depth, would be mere suicide.

To remain where he was would be to court certain death.

CHAPTER CCCCXIII.

RELATES HOW STEGGS AND WILD JUNIOR ESCAPED FROM THE FIRE.

AFTER all that he had gone through—after all the narrow escapes he had had—after having, as one might say, accomplished his great purpose, it really did seem as though he was destined to fail at last.

How could he escape?

Now that the window was opened, the flames found an exit from the room, and came roaring through into the open air with ever-increasing fury, so that Steggs's position became more and more untenable.

With a cry of agony, he seized the window-sill with his hands and lowered himself down until the full length of his arms was reached, for if he had remained sitting on the sill he would have been roasted.

But even now he had not bettered himself.

The flames now burst through the windows on the first floor, and came curling upwards, rising higher and higher each moment, as though intent upon wrapping themselves round his shrinking body.

Poor Steggs shrieked out again, and the cry was echoed by the mob below.

He looked down and saw thousands upon thousands of faces upturned towards him.

They looked ghastly white in the firelight.

In front of Jonathan Wild's house and in all the adjoining thoroughfares a vast mob of persons had collected.

Every moment showed some additions to their number.

The fire raged with unexampled fury, and threatened the destruction of the buildings contiguous to it.

Several fears were entertained for the prison of Newgate itself, although its walls were of such a thickness. On the roof, the Governor and most of the officials of the prison were collected, doing their best to subdue the flames. But they defied all their efforts, and grew fiercer and fiercer than before.

Far up into the sky the flames upreared themselves, tinging the firmament with a ruddy brightness, and alarming the country for miles round.

All could tell that a conflagration on a fearfully large scale was going on, and all hurried to the scene.

In those days they lacked the means and appliances which we possess, and therefore it is not to be wondered at that the fire should obtain the complete mastery, for even now buildings are burnt down to the ground, despite the tons of water poured upon them.

And so the fire had nearly all its own way.

All the people did was to try to check the further spread of the flames, and to confine them to the building in which they had broken out.

An incessant roar had come from the crowd of people from the first moment of its collection.

It was the aggregated sound of some thousands of voices speaking all at once.

But when they saw the fearfully hazardous position in which Steggs was placed, all became as silent as the grave.

Everyone seemed to hold his breath.

No steps were taken, however, to render the least assistance to the man who was in so much peril.

Then Steggs uttered a shriek.

It sounded high and clear above the roaring of the flames.

"Help—help!" he cried. "Save me! oh, save me!"

He felt that he was being slowly roasted, and that the strength was gradually leaving his arms.

His fingers were losing their grasp upon the sill.

In another moment he was sure he should be precipitated to the earth.

But his cry for aid had been heard, and served to rouse the people to action.

A man stepped forward who wore one of those long ample cloaks which were fashionable for so many years.

He took this off instantly, and said to those nearest to him:

"Take hold of this and stretch it out! We shall be able to catch the poor devil when he falls!"

A dozen sprang forward and took hold of the cloak, which they held like a blanket.

Then the owner of the cloak said:

"Let go your hold! Don't be afraid! Let go your hold! We will catch you below! You won't be hurt!"

Steggs had seen what they were about, and understood it.

This gave him strength enough to continue his grasp a few seconds longer.

As soon as they spoke he let go.

Down he fell with frightful velocity.

But the cloak caught him, though the violence with which he fell bore it to the earth, and laid the holders of it prostrate.

Still it admirably served to break the force of his fall.

Indeed, he was quite unhurt, though, in consequence of his great state of weakness, he relapsed into a death-like swoon.

Upon this being perceived, he was carried off to the nearest hospital for his hurts to be attended to.

Here we will leave him, and return for the last time to the scene of conflagration.

Whether there were any more persons in Wild's house was what no one could tell, but they believed all had escaped, though the thief-taker himself had not been seen.

Suddenly, however, another shout came from the crowd, which signified that some one else had appeared.

This time it was on the roof.

It was a man.

He was crawling along on his face like a serpent, and he would not have been perceived had he not raised his head and peeped over the parapet.

The bright firelight played upon his countenance; and, had there been anyone below who knew him, that man would have been recognised as George Wild.

But how came he on the roof?

When Blueskin had fired at him with the pistol he had fallen down on the landing.

What was the extent of his injuries, or whether the wound which the bullet had inflicted was a fatal one or not, Blueskin had not troubled himself so far as to ascertain.

He had left him to his fate.

The wound was not a fatal one, however, for the end of Wild junior's career was not yet reached.

It was the heat of the fire that was raging around him that was the means principally of restoring him to his senses.

With returning animation had come returning recollection.

He remembered perfectly all that had taken place.

His wound was a serious one, and he had lost an immense quantity of blood; and now all objects swam around him, and his feet gave way.

He would have fallen to the ground, had he not seized the balustrades of the staircase.

These creaked ominously at the strain that was put upon them, and threatened every instant to give way.

Wild junior gasped painfully for breath.

Instead of cool, revivifying air, he gulped down nothing but dense smoke.

"I must make an effort to ascend," he said, "or else I shall be burned alive!"

Probably nothing else than such a contingency as this would have enabled Wild junior to crawl up the attic stairs.

But he did crawl up them, though it was very, very slowly; and he could feel them get hotter and hotter, while the smoke grew denser.

But he struggled upwards, for he felt that he was struggling for his life, and Wild junior had no inclination to say farewell to the world just at present.

The uppermost landing in Wild's house was at last gained.

But here the smoke had accumulated in surprising quantities.

With more presence of mind than under the circumstances anyone would have given him credit for possessing, Wild junior went to the window on the landing and flung it open to its full extent.

This had the effect of allowing the smoke to escape with great rapidity.

At the same time, by thrusting his head out, he was enabled to inhale the fresh, cool night air, for such it seemed to be.

This had a wonderful effect upon him.

He could feel himself grow stronger.

"The roof!" he said. "Yes, the roof! That is the only chance I have! The roof! I shall be safe then!"

While he had stood at the window the fire had made alarming progress.

This was attributable in a great measure, no doubt, to the draught caused by the open window.

But the landing was pretty clear from smoke.

The ladder that was used to reach the trap-door in the roof was in its accustomed position, and George Wild hastened to ascend it at once.

To remove the trap-door itself—which was covered on the outer side with lead—was almost beyond his strength.

But the flames beneath him continuing to rise, caused him to make the utmost exertions.

Little by little he pushed the trap-door aside until he had removed it sufficiently to crawl through.

The very tiles on the top of Wild's house were now hot, and they continued to get hotter and hotter with alarming and disagreeable rapidity.

Wild junior crawled down to the gutter, and then looked over the parapet in the manner we have described.

He shrank back again.

The people in the street were too far off to be able to render him any assistance.

He looked about him for some means of effecting his escape from his dangerous position.

His attention was now attracted by another shout, which seemed to come from somewhere above him.

He looked up.

On that part of the roof of Newgate which adjoined Wild's house a number of persons was assembled.

They waved their hands to him to approach them.

George obeyed, for he fancied that he now saw the means before him of making his escape.

Inspired by this feeling, he crawled along the hot tiles much faster than he had before.

The reader will remember that, although Wild's house adjoined the east side of the prison, yet it was by no means so high as the prison was itself.

Even from the apex of the slanting roof the distance to the parapet of Newgate was many feet.

Wild junior kept in the gutter until he reached the prison wall, then he commenced scrambling up.

He heard a cry from above, and then something fell on the roof before him.

It was a rope.

He seized it with a cry of joy.

"Tie it tightly round your body under the arms," cried a voice from above, "and then we will haul you up!"

Blessed words!

With trembling eagerness, Wild junior set about obeying this, the most welcome command he had ever received in his life.

He tied the knot in a moment, and signified that he had done so to those above.

Just as he did so, however, and before the rope was pulled quite tight, he heard a crackling noise beneath him.

Immediately afterwards the roof fell in with a terrific crash.

Wild junior gave himself up for lost as he felt himself fall a foot or two, and then stop with a jerk.

He had fastened the rope just in time.

Had he been a moment longer, he must have perished.

And what an awful death!

But it was not to be.

Those above had got firm hold of the rope, and they quickly enough pulled him up.

The fire was smothered for a moment by the falling in of the roof, and by the time the flames broke forth again, as they did with redoubled violence, George Wild was in safety on the top of Newgate.

But he fainted away.

He was carried down at once, and every attention was paid to him, though the Governor of Newgate, as he rubbed his hands together, secretly hoped that the great thief-taker had perished in the flames.

Little did he dream of what had taken place.

Little did he think that, so far from being a dead man, Jonathan Wild was at that moment pursuing his prisoners with great vigour and determination.

CHAPTER CCCCXIV.

FOLLOWS THE FUGITIVES AND THEIR PURSUERS TO THE BANKS OF THE THAMES, WHICH IS MADE THE SCENE OF A TRAGEDY.

AND still the fire raged.

But its fury soon abated after the falling of the roof, for when that happened, almost everything in the interior had been consumed.

All hope of saving the building had been abandoned, and the crowd still stayed watching the havoc wrought by the flames, as though impelled to do so by some irresistible fascination.

It was hoped that all the inmates had escaped.

Almost at the first alarm those janizaries who were in the house had rushed forth.

There were only two or three.

Most of them were out in search of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

Many speculations were hazarded as to the origin of the fire, but we need scarcely say that not one of them approached the truth.

And so, in the presence of a gaping multitude, Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker's house, was burnt to the ground.

We use these words in a literal sense.

A large quantity of wood had entered into the structure of Wild's house, and one after another the walls had fallen down, for the house was a very old one.

By daybreak nothing remained but a smouldering heap of ruins, to look at which it was difficult to believe they were all that remained of a large house.

But so it was.

Beyond all doubt, when Jonathan came to realise the

full extent of his loss, which certainly up to the present moment he had not done, his wrath would be very indeed.

Leaving all that remains of his much-dreaded residence and leaving the people gazing on the smouldering ruins, we will follow the fortunes of those three persons in whom it is presumed the reader feels the greatest possible amount of interest.

We have said how, after passing through the market-gates, the three fugitives had hurried down the lane.

Blueskin led the way.

In his hand he held his drawn sword.

He was fully determined to cut down any person who might be rash enough to attempt to stop him.

But no one appeared.

The streets were quite deserted; and gathering hope from this circumstance, they hurried along at the top of their speed.

Soon, however, there came upon their ears the sounds of pursuit; and when Edgworth Bess heard them she was ready to sink to the ground with fear.

But Jack Sheppard cheered her up as well as he was able, and told her how short the distance was that they had to go, and that when once they were on board the boat they would be safe.

This rallied the poor girl's energies, and she kept pace bravely with her companion.

Blueskin was just in front, and Jack took care to keep him in full view.

If he should happen to lose sight of him the consequences would be serious.

When Blueskin heard the sounds of pursuit, he became immediately attentive to them, in order to ascertain whether their pursuers were gaining upon them or not.

He soon found that those in the rear were gaining upon them rapidly.

So rapidly that long ere they could reach the banks of the Thames they would be overtaken.

It was necessary then that he should change his tactics.

Instead of continuing to go in a straight line towards his destination he began to wind about, in the hope that by rapidly doubling upon his course he should be able to throw his pursuers off the scent.

In this he appeared to have partially succeeded, for in a few moments afterwards they had manifestly gained upon their pursuers.

"Forward! Forward!" cried Blueskin. "We are close to the boat now, and a bold rush will do the business! When we once cast off we are right!"

This was by no means so right as Blueskin would have made out, for Jonathan Wild was not the man to abandon in a hurry any pursuit which he had undertaken.

Still it urged Edgworth Bess to make fresh exertions, though the poor girl was ready to sink to the earth with terror and fatigue.

And now another turn brought them into full view of the broad and silent river.

That was, indeed, a welcome sight to the three fugitives.

Blueskin knew just where the boat was stationed, and he was able to make his way towards it in a straight line.

It was between two tall warehouses that they caught a glimpse of the River Thames.

After going a few steps further, they espied the boat, and in a voice of exultation, Blueskin cried:

"There it is! there it is! All is well now! One more effort, and then we shall be beyond the reach of danger! There is the boat that will take us to another and a happier land!"

It was not until Blueskin spoke these words that Edgworth Bess obtained any clue as to what was likely to be their future proceedings.

But it was with unfeigned pleasure that she learned that they intended to leave England.

She pictured in a moment some happy country where Jonathan Wild was powerless to injure them.

Nothing could have inspired the young girl with so much strength and fortitude as these few words.

Her fatigue and terrors were for a time totally forgotten.

She bounded lightly and swiftly towards the river's edge.



JACK SHEPPARD, ON THE POINT OF ENTERING THE BOAT, IS SHOT BY JONATHAN WILD.

There was the boat close up to the shore.

Ned Cantle was seated in it, and when he saw them approach he immediately unshipped his oars so as to be in readiness to push off the instant they had taken their seats.

Blueskin reached the boat first, and leaped into it without delay.

He held out his arms to assist Edgworth Bess to follow him.

She seized them in a moment, and then he easily enough swung her into the boat.

Jack soon followed in the best way he was able.

The boat was rather a small one—almost too small, in fact, to carry four persons.

It sank down rather deeply when they entered it.

Just as Jack was scrambling into the hind part of the boat, the grating of wheels and the roar of voices in the distance came upon their ears.

"Quick, for your life—quick!" cried Ned Cantle—"cut the mooring-rope, or we shall be too late, after all!"

Jack cut the rope by which the boat was secured to a post driven into the shore, in a moment.

Ned Cantle dipped his oars into the water to give a vigorous sweep.

But the boat did not move.

The reason of this was simple enough.

While Ned Cantle had been seated in it awaiting the fugitives, the tide had run out, leaving the boat in shallow water.

Nevertheless, while Ned Cantle alone sat in it it remained afloat.

But the immediate consequence of the addition of weight which it received when the three fugitives entered was that the keel of the boat sank deeply into the soft ooze which had been left by the receding tide.

Several persons in the throng carried firearms, and a straggling, irregular volley was fired after the receding boat.

But it was already out of pistol-shot, and the bullets fell harmlessly into the water.

At this moment there came upon the ears of the tumultuous and excited throng that stood upon the river's bank the sound of oars rowed rapidly in the rowlocks.

Then, with a rush, a large boat came alongside, and a stentorian voice cried :

"Hilloa here, hilloa! What is the meaning of all this? Speak, somebody, at once!"

Jonathan Wild looked towards the boat that had come alongside, and then a perfect shriek of pleasure came from his lips.

The boat was a galley, and one of the largest of its kind.

It contained somewhere about a dozen men, all of whom were well armed, and attired in a kind of uniform.

The man who spoke stood up in the stern of the boat, and it was easy to see he was in command over the rest.

One glance was sufficient to inform not only the thief-taker but all the other persons on the shore that these men were the Thames police.

At the time of which we are writing, depredations were carried on upon the river to such an alarming extent, that it was found to be necessary to have large galleys filled with well-armed men, whose special duty it was to protect the craft in the river from the attacks of the Thames pirates, as the men were called who made a practice of boarding vessels which lay at anchor, and despoiling them of their most valuable contents.

Well might Jonathan Wild feel rejoiced when he saw who the arrivals were, and, in a loud screaming voice, he replied to the commanding officer in the boat.

"A thousand pounds reward!" cried Jonathan, who well knew that those few introductory words would have the effect of causing the utmost attention to be paid to all that followed. "A thousand pounds reward! In yonder boat is Blueskin, the notorious housebreaker! After him, I say! In the name of the King and Government I offer five hundred pounds, and I, Jonathan Wild, will give another five hundred pounds for his capture, alive or dead!"

"Blueskin, do you say?" said the officer of the police galley.

"Yes, yes!"

"And you are Mr. Wild?"

"Yes, yes! Look at me!"

"Well, I should not have known you!—you look as though you had been half roasted!"

"Curses! After them, I say, or you will be too late!"

"Pho—pho! We can go two feet to their one. Where do you say the boat is?"

"There! there!" said Wild, pointing across the river.

The officer followed the direction of his finger, and then perceived, in the far distance, something that looked like a small black speck on the surface of the water.

"A glass!" he said, to the man nearest to him, without moving his eyes.

A ship's telescope was handed to him, and placing it to his eye, the officer directed it to the speck, which by this time had almost ceased to be visible.

"Ah!" he said, "I see it. A small boat—a wherry. Two men are in it. One is rowing; the other is stooping down, doing something which I cannot make out."

"Yes, yes!" said Jonathan, "that is the boat. Your description is correct. Bring the persons in it—not forgetting the girl—to me, and you shall have your reward upon the spot!"

The officer shut up the telescope with a snap.

"Now my lads," he said, "you hear what Mr. Wild says. I would take his word for double the amount! After the boat! Bend your backs to it! This is likely to prove a good night's work for us, I think."

The river police uttered a cheer, and at once allowed their oars to dip into the water.

There were ten men, five on each side of the vessel, and each one had an oar.

One pull was given by all in concert, and then the boat shot out into the river like a racehorse.

The men were evidently highly stimulated by the re-

ward which Jonathan Wild had offered, and they made up their minds to earn it.

This was a contingency upon which Blueskin and Ned Cattle had not calculated.

Truly was their position more perilous than it had yet been.

There seemed but little chance of their being able to escape.

They had a start, and that was the only thing in their favour.

A proverb, too, says, "A stern chase is a long chase."

But this is all the hope that can possibly be derived from a contemplation of our friends' position.

The police galley, urged by ten oars, flew over the water "at least double the speed of their little skiff."

For a brief space, however, we will leave them, while we return to poor Jack Sheppard, whose position was certainly the more desperate of the two.

At the very moment when he felt more assured that he should make his escape than he had done at any other moment during that eventful night—when he was congratulating himself upon having achieved a victory over his enemies—when even he had succeeded in launching the boat—at that very moment was he unexpectedly struck down by the bullet from Wild's pistol.

Oh, that was indeed a triumph for the villainous thief-taker, and he chuckled hideously with delight when he thought of the extent of his victim's disappointment.

To strike him down at the moment when he did strike him down, was a glorious revenge indeed.

He would not have missed it for worlds.

As we have said, Jack Sheppard was seized by several of the crowd, and pulled out of the water.

He seemed to be quite lifeless.

He neither moved nor spoke when he was thus roughly handled, while from his breast there came a stream of blood.

All who touched him were of opinion that he was dead, and so he was left just where he was, on the ground, and no further notice was taken of him.

But now Jonathan Wild's thoughts turned towards his victim.

He had done all that he had the power to do in the way of ensuring the capture of Blueskin and Edgworth Bess.

Unfortunately for himself, his hurt prevented him from following in the pursuit, as he would have been delighted to do.

He consoled himself, though, with the thought that he had delegated it to persons who would strain every nerve, for no one knew better than he did what a powerful incentive so large a reward would be.

With his face expanded into a grin of horrible satisfaction, Wild watched the police galley until he could see it no longer, and then he bethought himself of Jack Sheppard.

He strode hastily to the spot upon which he lay, and for a moment gazed at him without saying a word.

The men who had been crowding round the body had shrunk back when the thief-taker approached; but one of the men now stepped forward, and said :

"What are we to do with him, Mr. Wild? I fancy that bullet has settled his business!"

Jonathan looked round, and then he saw that it was Quilt Arnold who had addressed him.

He had been about to utter something angrily, but now changed his intention.

"Is he really dead, Quilt?" he said.

"I don't know, Mr. Wild," was the reply; "but I fancy he is. You see the bullet struck him full in the breast."

"That cannot be," returned Wild. "His back was turned towards me when I fired."

"Then, if that is the case, the bullet has made a hole through him! Can you see where the blood is oozing from his breast?"

Wild looked downward. By the dim reflected light which came from the surface of the rippling water he could see that the breast of his victim was dappled with blood.

The crimson fluid oozed slowly forth, in consequence of the blood having coagulated over the surface of the wound.

Jack's face was turned upward.

His eyes were wide open, and covered with a glassy film.

His arms were extended, and his fists tightly clenched.

In fine, every appearance of a sudden and violent death was there.

"It does indeed look like it," said Wild, at length; "but I hope it is not so. If he dies by any other means than the hangman's rope, I shall be balked in my revenge. Take him up, some of you, and carry him!"

"I had better make a kind of litter, or stretcher, had I not, Mr. Wild?"

"Yes, yes; and then carry him to Newgate. I will follow with the hackney-coach, for I am sick and faint!"

Jonathan Wild was, indeed, sick and faint, and when he uttered this last sentence he reeled, and would probably have fallen heavily to the ground, had it not been for the interposition of Quilt Arnold.

That worthy, however, stretched out his arm just in time to save his rascally employer, and then he half carried him to the hackney-coach.

Jonathan recovered himself sufficiently just to scramble in and fall back on one of the seats.

There he sat, looking very little better than his unhappy victim.

The thief-taker had really made some remarkable exertions on this eventful night, considering the state in which he was, and now it is nothing surprising that a reaction should set in.

And a reaction it was, of a truly dreadful character.

It was not until his excitement thus suddenly subsided that Wild became conscious of the pain he was suffering.

Not only was there the ghastly wound in his throat, which was near being the death of him, but he was one mass of burns and bruises from head to foot.

The agony he suffered was most acute, and it was this alone which prevented him from falling into a state of unconsciousness.

The happy oblivion of pain which this would have produced was denied to him, and hideous groans issued from his lips.

In the meantime, Quilt had issued directions to several of the crowd, who dispersed themselves about the shore in search of materials with which to extemporise a litter.

Some rude planks were found, and these were deemed sufficient for the purpose.

When all was ready, the motionless body of Jack Sheppard was placed upon the planks, and carried by four men.

Jonathan Wild was then made acquainted with the fact that the cavalcade had started.

This seemed to rouse him more than anything else possibly could have done.

He shook off, in a great measure, the languid feeling which had weighed him down, and ordered the coachman to keep by the side of the body.

In this manner, then, was Jack Sheppard for the last time in his life, taken to the prison of Newgate.

Wild clutched the side of the carriage window convulsively, and leaned out on that side next to the body.

He was thus able to feast his eyes with a contemplation of his victim.

Slowly the strange procession made its way towards Newgate, which was at no great distance off.

This time, at least, there seemed but little chance of Jack Sheppard being able to elude the grasp of his captors.

Before they started, water had been dashed upon his face, in the hope of restoring him.

But it was in vain.

He remained as still as death itself.

And so, slowly though surely, the procession took its way through the streets, each moment swelling more and more, as other people, from curiosity or interest, joined it.

CHAPTER CCCCXVI.

JONATHAN WILD TAKES EFFECTUAL MEASURES TO PREVENT JACK SHEPPARD FROM MAKING ANOTHER ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE.

AT last the corner of the Old Bailey was turned, and then the black and gloomy prison of Newgate came in sight.

Frontingly it looked upon those who approached it.

Then, in a moment or two more, the whole of the strange cavalcade halted before its portal.

Quilt Arnold now took upon himself the task of assuming the direction of affairs, and so he ran up the little flight of stone steps leading to the door that opens on to the vestibule of Newgate, and seizing the ponderous knocker with both hands, he gave such a summons for admission, that the whole street echoed with the sound.

Strange to say, however, such immediate attention was not paid to the knocking as one would have expected, and after waiting as he considered long enough, Quilt Arnold renewed the summons.

Then the door was opened, and there appeared on the other side of it a crowd of excited-looking faces.

Prominent among them was Mr. Noakes, the Governor.

It seemed as though he was about to make some angry remark, and then his eye fell upon the throng outside, and he remained silent.

"I have brought you a prisoner, Mr. Noakes," said Quilt Arnold—"one you will be very glad to receive, I am sure. It is Jack Sheppard!"

Such a yell of delight came from the lips of the Governor of Newgate, when he was made the recipient of this intelligence, that the vaulted roof of the vestibule rang again with the sound.

"Jack Sheppard!" he ejaculated. "Where is he?"

"Here!"

The Governor ran down the steps.

But when he saw the pale, inert body on the planks, he drew back aghast with surprise.

And now Jonathan Wild leaned his head still further out of the window of the coach, and, in his old shrieking tones, he said:

"Curse you all! Are you going to stay here all night? Take him, will you? Curse you, make haste!"

This was another surprise for Mr. Noakes.

He had not noticed the hackney-coach, and the well-known accents of Jonathan Wild's voice came upon his ear like a thunderbolt.

The reader will remember that he had been secretly feasting himself with the hope that Jonathan Wild had perished in the burning ruins of his house; and yet there he was, and, so far as he could judge by the voice, strong and violent as ever.

The thief-taker's words produced an immediate effect upon the throng.

The rude bier upon which Jack was laid was lifted up, and carried into the vestibule.

Jonathan got out of the coach, and followed it.

Then the door of the prison was closed, and the mob left outside.

The vestibule of Newgate was tolerably well illuminated by the numerous oil-lamps that hung about, so that all things could be seen distinctly enough.

Attention and curiosity were equally divided between Jack Sheppard and the thief-taker.

The first was unquestionably most seriously hurt, for even now he gave no signs of returning animation.

As soon as he perceived this, Jonathan Wild was in an agony of fright that his victim would escape the death he had designed for him.

He impatiently shrieked out an order for a medical man to be summoned to make an examination of his hurts.

A man was immediately despatched upon this errand, and he returned with Mr. Snoxall, who happened to be the nearest.

A better man could scarcely have been found, for he was well skilled in the treatment of all kinds of wounds.

In a very business-like way, he removed a portion of Jack's clothing, and then sponged away the blood that had clotted about the wound.

"Why," he said, at length, "there is nothing serious in the matter here beyond the escape of blood and consequent exhaustion. A day or two will put this all right."

"Indeed? that is good news!" said Jonathan, hoarsely. Mr. Snoxall started.

He had not noticed that the thief-taker was standing in the vestibule, but he recognised his voice at once.

His astonishment was much increased when he saw Wild's horrible condition—covered with smoke, dirt, blood, and bruises.

He was about to remonstrate; but Wild, with a curse, bade him be silent and attend to Jack Sheppard.

The apothecary's statement was a correct one. Jack was not seriously hurt.

The bullet from Wild's pistol had struck him in rather a peculiar manner.

It had passed through the fleshy part of the body, just under the armpit, and ploughing the flesh along the ribs, finally flew off at his breast, for when Wild fired at him he was standing sideways.

From this it will be seen that the wound was nothing serious, though, no doubt, from the manner in which the bone was laid bare, it was a most painful one at the time it was inflicted, and quite sufficient to cause unconsciousness.

Then the flow of blood had been very great.

In fact, Jack's body had almost been drained of the vital fluid.

Beyond this, however, no harm had been done.

Can the reader imagine the delight with which Wild listened to this?

All his hopes revived again, and he should be able to execute his darling plan of causing Jack Sheppard to be executed.

Stimulants were then administered, and Jack shortly after opened his eyes.

But he was in such a weak and exhausted state, that he evidently had no idea of where he was.

He closed his eyes again; but this time it was in sleep.

Snoxall looked up inquiringly, as he said:

"Where shall you put him?" Although the wound is not dangerous, yet he will require to have great attention paid to him."

A consultation between the Governor of Newgate and the thief-taker hereupon took place, and it was decided that Jack Sheppard should be taken to one of the strong rooms in the prison.

"I will never leave him now!" Wild muttered. "I will never leave him again! I will keep my eye upon him till the moment comes for execution, and I will take care to see that life is really extinct! What else may happen I care not; but, until his execution, I will never leave him!"

Such was the thief-taker's muttered resolution, and we shall see shortly how well he adhered to it.

A strong room was selected by the Governor, and into this Jack Sheppard was now carried.

He was as helpless as any infant, and, for some time at least, there would not be much trouble in keeping him secure, for he did not appear to have so much strength as would enable him to lift up his hand.

A bed was carried into the strong room, and on this Jack was laid, still in a state of perfect unconsciousness of all that was going on around him.

This done, they prepared to depart.

"You need not feel alarmed about him now, Mr. Wild," said the Governor, addressing himself aside to the thief-taker.

Jonathan showed his teeth like some wild animal about to bite.

"Why not?" he asked.

The Governor shrugged his shoulders.

"He can't move."

"I don't know that," said Wild. "Would you trust him?"

"Certainly, I would now."

"Then I would not."

"Mr. Wild, I know this young imp, whose execution I pray for quite as devoutly as you do yourself, has caused more ill blood between us than anything else. But, just for once, do me the favour of leaving him in my charge, and I will answer for his safety with my head."

"Bah!" said Wild; "I left him to you before, didn't I, and what was the result? No, no! In this affair, at least, I will employ no deputy. I will see to his safety myself."

"As you will, Mr. Wild. I shall always be glad to oblige you in all things. Would you be good enough to step this way?"

"What for?"

"To leave this room."

"Leave this room?" repeated Wild, in a shrieking voice.

"Yes, Mr. Wild," said the Governor, who was not a little alarmed at his manner. "You don't think of staying here always, do you?"

"Well, not always!" said Jonathan, with peculiar significance.

"I thought not. As for Jack Sheppard, he is all right now. He can't stir if his life depended upon it, and so

you need not be afraid that he will break out of this room."

"Indeed!" said Wild, in the same tone as he had previously employed. "Indeed!"

The Governor looked at him mistrustfully.

He wondered what that odd tone meant.

No good, he felt sure.

But so great was the dread that he had of the thief-taker that he resolved to take no notice of it, for he was afraid if he did that he would only exasperate him the more.

Therefore he spoke quite calmly, and somewhat persuasively.

"Come, Mr. Wild, I give you my word this is a very strong room—very strong indeed. And look at the door. It is as secure as the door of a cell. Here are two massive bolts, and an excellent lock; so you need have no apprehension—he will be quite secure!"

"And so," said Wild, with a sneer, "in spite of all that has occurred, you would still be fool enough to trust to such things as bolts and locks to keep Jack Sheppard safe?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Wild?"

"What do I mean? Just what I say, and no more. Answer my question."

"What else can be done?"

"I will tell you, Mr. Noakes. That young villain has slipped through my fingers and baulked my vengeance more than once, as you very well know."

"And mine, too," said the Governor.

"Well, perhaps so!" returned Wild; "but I am resolved, now that I have once more got him in my power, that I will not let him slip through my fingers again."

"I don't think you need be apprehensive this time. Look at him, Mr. Wild. There he lies as helpless as any kitten."

"Bah! I shall not trust to that."

"Then you have some plan, Mr. Wild, for keeping him secure?"

"Of course I have."

"What is it, Mr. Wild?"

"I will tell you," said Jonathan, "and then you can pass your opinion upon it."

"Very good."

"Then," said the thief-taker, in a voice of malignant earnestness, "I have firmly made up my mind never to remove my eyes from Jack Sheppard's body until after I have seen him executed at Tyburn."

There was something so cold-blooded in the thief-taker's manner that even the Governor of Newgate shuddered as he said:

"Never take your eyes off him, Mr. Wild?"

"Yes."

"But how shall you manage that?"

"Simply enough. I shall sit with him, no matter where he is placed, and never stir away for a moment."

"Impossible, Mr. Wild!"

"Bah! stuff! I know very well that it is possible, and if there are any little difficulties in the way, I shall have to constrain you to remove them."

"But it is against the prison regulations."

"What do I care for that? It is quite clear that you are not able to keep him in safety, and so I shall take that upon myself. If anyone wants me, I can't be seen. Here I am, and here I shall stay; and I tell you once for all that I shall not leave this cell, or strong room, or what you call it, until Jack Sheppard does so."

"Well, if such is your will, Mr. Wild, I must try what can be done."

"Of course you must; and now, in the first place, fetch me a table and a comfortable chair—one that I can go to sleep in when necessary."

"It's against all the regulations."

"D—n the regulations! I must have them, and I will. Fetch them! And, look here, bring a stone jar of brandy and a cup to drink out of."

Mr. Noakes was not in a position to deny anything that Wild asked, and so he promised to obey.

This little conversation had gone on between them with great vigour.

At the close of it, some one tapped gently at the half-open door of the cell, and then Mr. Snoxall, the apothecary, entered.

He had been to his own house to procure some bandages and other articles necessary for dressing Jack's wound.

Wild came up to the bed-side and watched the proceedings.

The Governor, at a word from the thief-taker, set off to fetch the articles for which he had asked.

Even Wild was surgeon enough to know that Jack's wound was by no means dangerous.

Mr. Snoxall did his work in silence; and then, turning round to the thief-taker, said:

"Mr. Wild, what brings you here, and in such a condition as you now are, I know not. I have ceased to wonder at anything you may do."

Jonathan grinned, for he took this remark as a kind of compliment.

"Never mind what brings me here, Mr. Snoxall. Let it be enough for you to know that for some few days or so I am going to share this cell along with my friend Jack Sheppard, and so you will be able to attend to both of us at the same time."

In spite of what he had just said, Mr. Snoxall stared with surprise.

"Going to share this cell?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Very well, Mr. Wild; but let me tell you that you are in a very dangerous state, and unless you are very careful I would not give so much as two pins for your life."

"You can attend to me here, can you not?"

"Certainly I can."

"Then do so."

"But what ever have you been doing?"

"Never mind. Don't you know my house is burned down?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I got singed a little in making my escape—that's all."

The apothecary smiled at Jonathan's idea of being singed a little.

In reality, he was one mass of burns from head to foot.

Mr. Snoxall attended to him, however, with his usual skill; and when he had finished, the Governor, accompanied by two turnkeys, entered the strong room.

The latter carried between them a small round table and a chair, which were intended for Wild's convenience.

They were placed against the wall opposite to Jack Sheppard's bed, so that the thief-taker could sit and watch his victim to his heart's content.

Mr. Noakes brought the jar of brandy and a cup.

Jonathan sat down with a feeling of relief, for he was terribly exhausted; and after a few more words the door of the strong room was closed and fastened, and he was left alone along with the prisoner.

CHAPTER CCCCXVII.

BLUESKIN AND NED CANTLE ARE PURSUED BY THE THAMES POLICE.

LEAVING the thief-taker to exult over his victim—to feast his eyes upon him, and rejoice at his helplessness—we will follow, for a short time, those persons whose position when we last saw them was one of so much danger.

We allude, of course, to Blueskin and Edgworth Bess, and to their new-found but faithful friend, Ned Cantle.

Can the reader form some idea of the feelings of the former?

He had been congratulating himself that all was well, and that they should escape, when he saw Jack Sheppard fall beneath the bullet of his foe.

It was well for them all, however, that Ned Cantle had rowed so promptly into the middle of the stream, for had he not done so, or had they attempted the rescue of their companion, they would most certainly have been captured.

Still, Blueskin could not reconcile himself to thus deserting his friend, although he well knew that Jack Sheppard was able to look after himself.

He had faith in his power to extricate himself from a perilous position, but yet he felt uneasy.

Something seemed to tell him that Jack was in greater danger than he had ever yet known.

All hope of helping now was at an end, and so he turned his attention to their own position, which required all the consideration he could possibly give to it.

Edgworth Bess still lay in a swoon at the bottom of the boat, just as she had fallen.

His first care was to endeavour to restore her.

For this purpose he dipped his hat into the water, and sprinkled her face with the cool fluid.

It revived her in a few moments.

She opened her eyes, and gave utterance to a piteous moan.

Blueskin stooped down in order to raise her to a more comfortable posture.

It was while he was thus engaged that the police officer in the galley looked through his telescope, and reported what he saw to Jonathan Wild.

The fugitives were too far off the shore, and otherwise too intently occupied, to notice what was taking place, and they remained ignorant for some time longer yet that they were pursued.

Nevertheless, although all seemed well, Ned Cantle continued to use the oars with great vigour.

It was only for a moment that Edgworth Bess retained possession of her senses.

The full tide of recollection came back to her.

She remembered what had occurred, and with another shriek fainted again.

It was at this moment that Ned Cantle caught sight of the police galley swiftly approaching them.

"By heaven," he cried, "we are pursued!"

Blueskin looked round immediately.

"The Thames police!" he cried.

"Yes," said Ned Cantle. "You may depend they have been set on by Jonathan Wild."

"Row—row for your life!"

"It's no good! It's all up with us now! We may as well give in at once!"

"Never! never!" exclaimed Blueskin. "Lend me an oar!"

"What's the use of exhausting yourself? Can't you see they are coming up hand over hand? They go two feet to our one! They must overtake us!"

"Lend me an oar!" said Blueskin, seizing one.

"Now," he said, "make an effort. We have not much further to go. Yonder is London Bridge. Row with all your might. We shall escape them yet!"

"I will try," said Ned Cantle; "but I tell you beforehand that it will be no good."

Blueskin was well skilled in the use of the oar, and the manner in which the boat flew over the water was really astonishing, for his efforts were ably seconded by Ned Cantle.

Still the police galley gained upon them.

Not so rapidly as before; but still it did gain upon them, and in a manner to make the race a very exciting one.

In the distance could be seen the black arches of Old London Bridge, the whole structure looking more like some huge cloud than aught else.

Blueskin felt that if they could pass the bridge all would yet be well, as among the number of different vessels lying in the Pool it would be difficult to follow them.

But despite their almost superhuman exertions, the police galley came nearer and nearer still.

And now, having got as they considered near enough, the officer in command fired a pistol in the air.

On the river this was understood as a signal for a boat to leave-to.

But of course our friends paid not the slightest attention to it.

When the report of the pistol had died away, something was said in a loud voice, which was in reality a command to the fugitives to stop.

To this they paid no more attention than they did to the other signal.

Urged by ten oars, the police galley gained upon the fugitives in a manner that was terrible to witness, and Blueskin began to think that after all Ned Cantle was right, and that they could not possibly escape.

But for all that he could not bring himself to think that he had better give in.

London Bridge was now only a few yards off, and beyond that the vessel was stationed which was to take them in safety to Amsterdam.

The tide was running out with great velocity, and as they got nearer to the bridge they could hear the roaring,

rushing sound produced by the water flowing through the narrow arches.

Old London Bridge bore but a very slight resemblance to the present one.

Its arches were exceedingly narrow, and rendered still more so by the platforms or starlings which had to be built round the buttresses to protect them from the action of the tide.

It required great skill on the part of the boatmen to guide their vessels through these narrow arches, and in spite of all their care and skill, accidents happened with alarming frequency.

By the roar of the water, Ned Cantle could tell that on the present occasion the greatest care would be necessary in order to guide the boat safely under.

The great obstruction to the water that these buttresses and starlings formed, caused it to flow through the arches as through so many flood-gates.

When several yards from the bridge, Ned Cantle shipped his oar and stood upright in the boat, holding it in his hand.

He knew the boat could not go any faster than the tide would carry it without incurring great danger, for the direction in which the tide flowed had a tendency to draw the boat against the starlings.

His task now was to keep the boat as nearly in the centre of one of the arches as he could, for by this means alone could their destruction be avoided.

Blueskin watched him anxiously.

As they got nearer to the bridge, he could feel the velocity of the boat increased until its speed became alarming.

By a skilful use of his oar, however, Ned Cantle succeeded in keeping in the requisite direction.

Another moment and they were under the shadow of the bridge.

Then the tide gave a capricious turn, and a cry of alarm came from Blueskin's lips.

But Ned Cantle saw in a moment that the course of the boat was changed, and he thrust his oar against the starling towards which the head of the boat was driving.

A collision seemed inevitable.

He pushed with all his strength, but he could not compete with the power of the tide.

Blueskin sprang to his assistance.

By their joint efforts the boat was kept off, though the prow of the boat grated against the wooden piles.

The next instant they were under the bridge and out in the open air, having sustained but a trifling damage.

Their first care now was to resume their oars, and make for the vessel which was awaiting them.

Ned Cantle, however, cast an anxious glance after his pursuers, and an ejaculation of satisfaction came from his lips.

It was immediately echoed by Blueskin.

The police officers in the galley had relied a little too much on their own skill.

They saw Ned Cantle stand up in the boat in order to "shoot the bridge," as the phrase went, and they resolved to make one desperate effort to secure their prey.

It will readily be believed that the large reward which Wild had offered called forth all their energies.

To gain so much they would not mind a little risk, and besides, they soon began to feel the excitement of the chase.

Shooting the bridge was no fresh thing to them.

They had done it safely hundreds of times, and they resolved to pass under at full speed.

This movement they fully expected would enable them to overtake the fugitives.

Two men stood up in the prow of the boat with strong boat-hooks.

The officer in command held the tiller.

Having got the boat in a proper direction, the men were ordered to bend their backs to their task.

The eight remaining rowers pulled as if for life and death.

As the flow of the current was so very rapid, it may be imagined how great their speed was.

It was terrible to look at.

The boat seemed to fly over the water, as though impelled by more than mortal power.

The men at the prow held their breaths, for should

they strike against any projection while going at such a frightful rate, their destruction would be certain.

Even the officer in command set his teeth hard as he grasped the tiller, and strove to keep the head of the boat in the centre of the arch.

Then came a dark shadow over the vessel.

They were beneath the arch.

Another moment—or even less—and then all would be well—they would be free.

At this moment the cross current, which was so near being fatal to the fugitives, caught the boat.

The chief officer called out hoarsely to his men.

But his voice was drowned in a terrible crash.

The men with the boat-hooks were powerless against the tide, and the boat struck with full force against the wooden piles of the starling.

There was a loud cry from many voices, and then the police galley and its occupants vanished as if by the influence of magic.

Their terrific speed made their destruction certain.

Such was the force with which the boat struck that it was shivered to atoms, although it had been made of double strength in consequence of the kind of service required from it.

The men, each clinging frantically to their oars, were carried with breathless rapidity far down the stream.

It was this catastrophe which had brought the ejaculations from the lips of Blueskin and Ned Cantle.

Those enemies which had caused them so much alarm were now no more to be dreaded.

Their discomfiture was complete.

Not a trace of them remained.

"Now," cried Blueskin, "we have fresh hopes. Row, Ned, and all will yet be well! How far is it to the vessel?"

"Not more than half a mile."

"Quick, then!"

"All right; but you have nothing to fear from the river police now. That accident was a most fortunate one for us, for it has rid us of our enemies entirely."

"It has—it has! But do not let us trust too much to our apparent safety."

"No, it were best not. Can you see anything of them?"

"Nothing; and yet, stay. Is not that a head?"

"Yes; and there is another—and another!"

"Quick—then, quick! We must by no means relax our efforts. The officers will swim towards some of the vessels, get on board, and spread the alarm."

"And institute a fresh pursuit."

"Yes, yes! Push on with what speed you can!"

Away went the boat, threading its way with remarkable facility among the other craft at their moorings, until at length Ned Cantle said:

"Take my oar for a few minutes, and row onwards."

"What are you about to do?" asked Blueskin, as he obeyed.

"Give the signal that we are at hand."

"All right!"

Blueskin urged the boat onwards, and Ned Cantle stooped down and picked something up from the bottom of the boat.

What this was, Blueskin could not very well make out, for Ned Cantle turned his face in the direction in which they were going.

The next moment, however, he heard a peculiar rushing sound, and there shot up into the air a beautiful bright light.

It was a rocket.

After ascending to a certain height, it burst with a loud report, and a shower of fire came down.

Ned Cantle fixed his eyes steadily in advance, on the look-out for the responsive signal.

He had not long to wait.

Just before them a bright crimson light shone out of the darkness.

"That is our vessel!" he said, turning to Blueskin.

"Will you row, and I will guide the boat alongside?"

"Certainly!"

The boat rapidly neared the red light, and then Blueskin was able to discover the outlines of a rather heavy-looking vessel.

In another moment they were alongside.

Some words were exchanged between Ned Cantle and

those on board, and then a rope was thrown, with which the boat was secured to the lugger.

This being done, the whole party were helped on deck. Edgworth Bess still remained insensible.

CHAPTER CCCCXVIII.

IN WHICH BLUESKIN DISCOVERS THAT HE IS BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

In this unconscious state poor Edgworth Bess was carried down into the cabin, whither Blueskin followed her.

His first care was to restore her to her senses, but this he found to be no easy task.

This second relapse was aggravated by a blow on the head which she had received when she fell backwards to the bottom of the boat.

Water was sprinkled upon her face, and her temples were chafed with brandy, but all to no purpose.

Ned Cantle remained on deck in close conversation with the captain of the lugger.

In a few words, he contrived to make this individual acquainted with the exact state of affairs.

On his part, the captain lost not a moment in giving instructions for the vessel to get under-weight.

It was a small craft, but well built, and evidently constructed with a view to making great speed, though she had not outwardly the appearance of it.

Her crew was altogether formed of Englishmen, and the manner in which they obeyed their captain's commands showed that they were no novices in their trade.

In an incredibly short space of time the lugger was got under-weight, and was slowly forging its way among the vessels in the Pool, as that part of the Thames is called that lies between the docks and London Bridge.

A sharp look-out was kept, for Ned Cantle fully expected that they would be pursued by the River police, who would not allow themselves to be baulked by the occurrence of an accident such as we have described.

The captain fully agreed with him, for he, too, knew full well the determined character of these men.

When once they pursued an object, it was but rarely they abandoned it.

It was, then, the best thing that could be done to get clear of the Pool as soon as possible, for it was unusually crowded with vessels, of course obstructing the speed of the lugger.

When they were clear of these they would be able to hoist sail at once, and then their danger would be much diminished.

At present, however, they could perceive no signs of pursuit.

Blueskin was anxious in the extreme to be upon deck, where he would be able to judge better of the state of affairs.

But he controlled this desire, and continued his attentions to Edgworth Bess, whose condition excited in him breast feelings of very great alarm.

At length his assiduous endeavours were crowned with success.

The poor girl once more opened her eyes, and looked feebly around her.

She was amazed and, as it seemed, half terrified by the strange objects on which her glance fell.

The rattling of the cordage, too—the hoarse cries of the men on deck—and, above all, the motion of the vessel itself—were all well calculated to inspire her with terror.

But her eyes rested at last upon Blueskin's countenance, which had on it an expression of great concern, and then she grew calm and assured, for she knew that she was in safety, or he would not be bending over her.

"Let me entreat you to keep perfectly quiet for a little while!" he said. "Let me entreat you to do so. Pray be calm! Our immediate danger is over, and I trust ere long I shall be able to say all is well."

"What place is this?" asked Edgworth Bess, once more glancing around her; "and what is this movement? and what are those strange sounds?"

"Compose yourself, and I will tell you. You are on board a small ship which is bound for Amsterdam. I have every hope that we shall be able to reach our destination in safety."

"And Jack?" cried the poor girl, in a voice of anguish, as she recollected what had happened to him—"Jack—

Jack! Where is he? Tell me at once! Do not—pray do not keep me in suspense!"

"I am sorry to say that Jack has fallen into trouble."

"Alas!" she cried. "He is killed!"

"No—no! I do not think that—indeed I do not! He may be hurt, and perhaps seriously, but not killed."

"But why did you not put back to the shore and aid him?"

"I wished to do so, but Ned Cantle convinced me that it was too late. I might have shared captivity with him, but I could not have saved him, so I thought it best to look after your safety."

"Alas—alas!"

"Do not weep!—dry your eyes! I think I can speak some words of comfort."

"What are they?"

"We are, as I have told you, on board a vessel bound for Amsterdam. What trouble we have had to get on board your little dream of. We should all have been prisoners by this time but for the accidental capsizing of our enemies' boat. This alone enabled us to gain the ship!"

"But what are your words of comfort?"

"Jack Sheppard, I firmly believe, is at the very worst a prisoner. Assuming so much, I do not think there is much need of apprehension, for past events ought to prove to you that such a thing is not to him so great a calamity as it is to others. He has a sort of talent for making escapes!"

"Well—well?"

"You want to hear my words of comfort?"

"I do."

"Well, then, they are these: I shall take the earliest opportunity of getting on shore, and when I have done so I shall make my way direct to London. I will then either save Jack Sheppard or perish with him!"

"And me?"

"I propose to leave you along with Ned Cantle."

"Who is that?"

"The man you saw in the boat."

"Is he to be trusted?"

"Fully and completely."

"What then?"

"I shall supply him with funds, and leave him to take you to Amsterdam, in which city, or somewhere near it, I doubt not he will be able to find you a place of refuge."

"And what will you do?"

"I will save Jack Sheppard if I can, and we will both repair to Amsterdam with all speed, where we shall join you."

"And should you fail?"

"We will not talk of that. I have made up my mind to succeed!"

"Alas! Was anyone so persecuted as myself?"

"No one so cruelly or undeservedly. But come, cheer up! Do not give way to despair!"

"Where are we now?"

"That is what I should very much like to know. We are somewhere on the Thames, but that is all the information I can give you. I should very much like to take a glance above, and see how matters are progressing, if you would not mind me leaving you for a short time."

"No—no! Go at once! But return soon!"

"I will—I will!"

"And bring me a faithful report of how matters are going on above."

"Depend upon me!"

"Go, then, for I can imagine your anxiety by what I feel myself!"

Blueskin was much pleased to obtain Edgworth Bess's consent so easily, and to find that she spoke so reasonably.

He lost no time in leaving the cabin and making his way on to the deck.

Here all was calm enough.

Day had just dawned, and there came over the surface of the water long rippling streams of light.

A glowing redness, too, in the eastern horizon proclaimed that the sun was about to rise.

Ned Cantle saw Blueskin come on deck, and at once hastened towards him.

The captain followed.

"Is all well, Ned?"

"Yes, at present. But here is my friend the captain."



JACK SHEPPARD AWAKES TO FIND HIMSELF ONCE MORE IN THE POWER OF JONATHAN WILD.

Blueskin and the captain shook hands with each other warmly, and the latter said, in a rough voice:

"I am glad to see you, and gladder still to do you a service! You may depend I will do all I can for you!"

"Thanks—thanks!"

"Nay, never mind thanks! It's done willingly enough."

"Are we pursued?" asked Blueskin.

"At present, I think not; but I cannot tell how soon we may be. It is more likely that we shall than not."

"Is your vessel a good sailer?"

"Excellent. She was built purposely for speed."

"I am glad of that."

"You may have cause to be."

"How far down the water are we? In this dim light I can scarcely make out where we are."

"We are nearly opposite Limehouse."

"No further than that?"

"No; the fact is, the Pool was over-crowded, and we

No. 87.—BLUESKIN.

have had a great deal of trouble in making our way out of it. It is a great loss of time to keep dodging in and out of vessels, and as for putting your sail on, that's out of the question."

"Of course—of course!"

"We shall get on all right enough now, though. It's a lovely morning for a run! There's a good stiff breeze, blowing from the right quarter, and we have got every stitch of canvas spread. Look aloft!"

Blueskin did so, and saw above him a perfect mass of sails.

"I do not understand it," he said, "but we are cutting through the water at a good rate."

"Yes; and when we get lower down the stream, we shall make better progress still."

The captain now hurried off to issue some instructions to the crew, and Blueskin took advantage of this opportunity to speak to his new friend Ned Cantle.

"What do you think of the state of affairs now?"

The reply was a shake of the head.

"What is the meaning of that?"

"Why, I fancy the Thames police will make themselves known to us before long! Jonathan Wild is not the sort of man to suffer you to slip through his fingers without making an effort to prevent you!"

"Very true."

"Then look out for squalls, say I, for you may depend you won't have it all plain sailing."

"I never asked you, Ned, how far you intended to go with us."

"To speak the truth, I did not think of coming on board at all, only what has occurred made me think I had better do so."

"And what were your intentions?"

"Why, if there was a chance of such a thing, I thought of being put ashore somewhere between here and Sheerness, and making my way back to London."

"Well, Ned, I have a favour to ask of you, and I should like to ask it now, because time serves, and we may not have another such an opportunity."

"That is very likely indeed."

"Well, then, I need scarcely tell you that the misfortune which has befallen Jack Sheppard has had the effect of upsetting all my plans."

"I can easily believe that."

"I think the worst that has happened to him is that he has been made prisoner of Wild."

"I hope that is the worst."

"If it is, I shall not so much care—that is, if you grant me the favour I thought of asking you."

"You may be sure I shall do all in my power to aid you."

"Well, then, I want you to let me be put ashore in the manner you proposed to be yourself, and I want you to take my place, and accompany the lady in the cabin to Amsterdam."

"I will do that willingly enough! I suppose you intend to return to attempt the rescue of Jack Sheppard?"

"Just so."

"Well, I wish you luck."

"I can provide you with ample funds, and when you arrive I want you to find some place of refuge for the lady—somewhere out of the reach of Jonathan Wild."

"I know what you mean, and, what is more, I am acquainted with a place that will just answer our purpose."

"Better and better! May I consider that as arranged, then?"

"Certainly you may."

"That is sufficient! Keep snug, and I will take the earliest opportunity of visiting Amsterdam."

"And I hope you will bring Jack Sheppard with you!"

"I shall not come without him—but stay, we may as well have this matter thoroughly settled while we are about it."

"What do you mean?"

"When I arrive at Amsterdam, what steps shall I take to find you?"

"That is well thought of!"

"Some means must be adopted."

"There is no difficulty about it, whatever. I am well acquainted with Amsterdam, although it is some years since I last visited it. Have you ever been there?"

"Never."

"Then you will have to pay particular attention to my instructions. The finest and largest building in the whole city is called the *Stadhuis*. Of course you will have no difficulty in finding it. Well, opposite the back part of the *Stadhuis*, and abutting upon the canal, is a small beer-house, kept by a widow named *Graacht*. You will see it painted up over the door. Can you recollect this?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Well, then, enter this house and pronounce the word *Keizer*. Let me hear you. That will do. When you say that, she will know you are a friend, and, upon your telling her you want to see me, she will send a guide with you who will take you to where I am to be found."

"That is a very excellent arrangement!"

"You will not forget it?"

"You may depend upon that! I am glad we have succeeded in so adjusting the affair. I trust that we shall get off without being pursued, and that an early opportunity will be found of putting me ashore."

"I will speak to the captain about that, and ascertain from him which is the safest place to touch at. It may be that he has some place to call at down the river."

"Just so; or he might put me in the boat we came aboard with, and I could row myself on shore."

"You might do so, but it won't do to talk about it just at present. Look there!"

"Look where?"

"Yonder! It is just as I expected from the first! The Thames police have got hold of a vessel, and are coming down upon us with every stitch of canvas set!"

CHAPTER CCCCIX.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE SAUCY KATE FINDS EXCELLENT HIDING-PLACES FOR THE THREE FUGITIVES.

DURING this conversation with Ned Cattle—and more especially during the latter part of it—Blueskin forgot that they were in danger of being pursued.

The words which his companion had just spoken came, therefore, upon his ears with great suddenness, and he looked around him with a startled air.

By this time the sun had fairly risen, and his cheering beams had dissipated the clouds of mist that hung about the shores or over the surface of the river.

All objects could now be readily perceived, but nothing showed out with so much distinctness as the vessel to which Ned Cattle had called attention.

It was a small boat, but it carried a great quantity of sail, and was, moreover, propelled by oars, the sparkle of which, as they dipped into the water, could be plainly distinguished in the sunlight.

It was evident in a moment that its speed was far superior to that of the lugger, and consequently ere long it would most certainly overtake it.

Blueskin looked upon this vessel uneasily, and turned an inquiring glance upon his companion, who replied by simply saying:

"It is no more than I have all along expected! While we have been talking, my eyes have been constantly directed up the stream. My only wonder is that our enemies have not made their appearance before!"

"They will overtake us!"

"Most certainly! It would be ridiculous to suppose that we could outsail a craft of that sort!"

"What is to be done, then?"

"We must ask the captain."

"It is a much smaller vessel than this one, and does not contain so many men. We could fight it."

"Such a course as that would never do."

"Why not? Would you yield without striking a blow?"

"If we were to engage with that craft in broad daylight, we should have all the vessels in the river down upon us!"

"But what is to be done?" said Blueskin, anxiously.

"I can see that she draws nearer and nearer!"

"You are right; but we must place ourselves under the orders of the captain. Here he comes!"

The captain could now be perceived approaching, and, by the expression of his face, it could be easily seen that he intended to accost them.

First, however, to make all things clear, it will be necessary to say a word or two about the vessel in the rear.

Ned Cattle's conjecture came very near the truth.

After the accident at the bridge, the police officers, who were in the galley supporting themselves with the oars, swam towards the nearest vessel.

The news of the accident quickly spread among the different craft that were at anchor near the spot, and they immediately lent all the aid in their power.

To any other men than the Thames police, the accident would have been a serious one.

But they could all swim, and were as tough as leather, and a good ducking was a thing they cared nothing about.

In a very few moments, indeed, they shook themselves and became quite recovered.

The chief officer was terribly angry to think such an accident had happened.

He did not waste time in regrets, however, but, like a sensible man, set to work to repair the damage done.

With this view, he in a very short time got the boat under his control which we have described as being in the wake of the lugger.

It was so constructed as to be used as a sailing or rowing vessel.

He resolved to adopt both oars and sails, and by this means he made very great speed indeed.

First of all, however, he inquired whether any other vessel had left the Pool, and was informed that the Saucy Kate had not long before got under weigh, but was now almost out of sight.

This intelligence caused the officer to ponder a little.

The Saucy Kate was a vessel well known to him as a suspicious craft, though he had never been able to make out anything direct about her.

But her starting off now seemed a suspicious circumstance.

In order to ascertain whether his suspicions were well grounded or not, the commanding officer directed the boat to a vessel close to which the Saucy Kate had been moored.

Here he learned that a boat containing three persons had been seen, but he could not learn anything as to their having gone on board the Saucy Kate.

As there were no traces of the boat, however, the officer decided that his suspicions were correct, and set off down the river in pursuit.

It was not long before he made her out, though she was a long distance ahead.

Still he had confidence in his ability to overtake her, and he urged his men forward accordingly, encouraging them with the prospect of the reward.

The men scarcely needed this incentive, for they looked upon the fugitives as being the cause of the discomfort they had undergone, and conceived a personal hatred against them accordingly.

Some even went so far as to feel angry with them for giving them so much trouble to earn the reward.

But when they saw how rapidly they were gaining upon the Saucy Kate, they felt more at ease with themselves.

Such being the state of affairs on board the police vessel, we will now return to Blueskin, whose position is one of the most imminent danger conceivable.

So impatient was he, that he could not wait for the captain to speak first, as he doubtless would have done, but he cried:

"Do you see that vessel behind us?"

"Ay, ay! I see her!"

"And what do you make her out to be?"

"One thing is certain—she contains police officers. They must have a suspicion that you are on board."

"What is to be done?"

"That requires consideration."

"Can you not outslip them?"

"Oh dear, no! Such a thing is quite out of the question! Look how they gain upon us!"

"I can see they do. Are you going at the top of your speed?"

"Yes; we could not crack on another rag of canvas!"

"It's all over with us, then! I can tell you, however, that I will not surrender without giving them battle!"

"Pho, pho! Who spoke about surrendering? Why, if you will just put trust in me, I shall be able to make you all right—that is, without—"

"Come, come!" said Blueskin; "speak out! You must not keep me in this state of terrible suspense! What can you do?"

"Well, it all depends upon whether the officers know you are on board, or whether they only suspect it."

"Well, what then?"

"If they have any direct knowledge, it will be difficult."

"But how can we find out whether they have or not?"

"We cannot find out."

"Tell me your plan, then."

"I will; and in half a dozen words, too."

"Make haste, then."

"I should first tell you that the Thames police have had their suspicions of the Saucy Kate for a long time—and not without good reason—but, thank the fates, they have never been able to verify them in any way. I have always been lucky enough to keep clear of them. Now, for instance, I have not got a single article on board that they could find fault with, and so I am right enough as regards myself."

"Well, what then?"

"You see I have got nothing to fear from this visit.

Now, the Saucy Kate is a curious old craft, with more hiding-places in her than anyone would think for."

"Hiding-places?"

"Yes. Now do you begin to see my plan?"

"Is it to conceal us somewhere?"

"That's it."

"But do you think you have got hiding-places in this boat that would escape detection by the officers?"

"Yes, I do, and, what is more, I am sure of it!"

"All is well, then. If you can hide us somewhere securely, we have nothing to fear."

"There is only one danger, as I said at first, and that is, you may have been seen to come on board."

"I don't think we were."

"Well, perhaps not; but, you see, if the officers know for certain you are here, they won't rest until they have found you; but if they have only got their suspicions, it will be another matter."

"We must risk that."

"I really do not see what else you can do, and if it will be any satisfaction, let me tell you that I have such confidence in the hiding-places that I feel sure you are all right."

"If you have not settled it now, it's quite time you had, for the police are close behind!"

"All right, we have settled it."

"Be speedy, then!"

"Come this way, then," said the captain. "I shall have to hide you as well, Ned. Come below!"

The trio now descended into the interior of the vessel.

"There is the lady," cried Blueskin. "You will conceal her first?"

"Certainly."

"And if there is any choice in the nature of the hiding-places, you will give her the best?"

"Of course. You had better tell her to come out of the cabin, for there is no time to spare."

Blueskin hastened to the cabin, and in a few words made Edgworth Bess acquainted with the danger that threatened them, and the means which had been proposed to avert it.

He then led her out of the cabin.

"This way—this way!" said the captain, who had taken advantage of Blueskin's visit to the cabin to run upon deck. "That lubberly craft is coming up hand over hand, and they have begun to signal us to haul-to!"

"You will obey?"

"Obey? If I do not, they will be sure to be suspicious!"

"I was going to say you had better haul-to."

"I shall, as soon as ever you are in safety. Look here!"

While this conversation was going on, the captain had led Blueskin and Ned Cattle down some steps until the lowest portion of the vessel, just above the keel, was reached.

The dim radiance that came from the small lantern that the captain carried was all that illuminated this place, so, as a matter of course, Blueskin was only able to see about him in a very imperfect manner indeed.

The captain, too, gave him no leisure for examination, for he said to him:

"Just hold the lantern a moment, and you, Ned, lend a hand!"

"Ay, ay!"

Blueskin looked curiously to see what was going forward.

The captain and Ned Cattle stooped down, and then carefully pulled up one of the planks just above where the keel should be.

A small recess was then disclosed, in size and shape not unlike a coffin.

"The lady must hide there," said the captain.

Edgworth Bess shrank back on hearing this announcement.

But her timidity was only natural.

A whispered word from Blueskin reassured her, and she answered that she was ready.

There was no difficulty about lying down in the little recess, for it was both wide and long enough for her to lie down at full length.

This she did, and the captain said, as he held the plank in his hand with which he intended to cover her:

"For safety's sake, miss, you mustn't mind a few disagreeables! I am going to shut you in this place, but I

will promise not to keep you here a moment longer than I can help. If you hear a tremendous noise above you, don't you mind. You won't be hurt, and all you have got to do is to keep quiet."

"I will obey your instructions faithfully."

"That's right, then! Keep still, and I will come and release you as soon as I am able."

With these words, the captain and Ned Cantle fitted the plank very carefully over the recess, and no one would have dreamed for a moment that there was such a hiding-place in existence.

"Now, Blueskin," said the captain, "and you too, Ned, I have got to dispose of you, and in a word I can tell you how I intend to do it."

"How—how?"

"Well, my cargo is a great quantity of ale in hogsheds. There they are, look!"

The captain waved his lantern in one direction, and then a number of casks piled up became visible.

"Now, those casks are full," he said, "with the exception of three."

"And you will put us into two of them?"

"Just so."

"Be quick then, I beg!"

"All in good time! Here's yours."

The captain paused before a cask which, in appearance, no way differed from the rest.

He tapped it with his knuckles to show that it was empty, and then raised the head.

"Now then," he cried, "jump in! You will be all right!"

Blueskin sprang into the cask without hesitation, and the captain occupied himself with fixing the head in.

While doing so, he said:

"Don't be alarmed if I roll you about a little, or if you hear a tremendous noise. You are safe, and can come to no hurt."

"All right!"

By the time he had said this, the captain had completed his task, and Blueskin was a prisoner.

He now turned round to Ned Cantle, whom he served in a precisely similar manner.

Neither of them fully understood what the captain meant to do, but they were certain his scheme for baffling the Thames police was not yet completed.

With a great amount of impatience and anxiety, they awaited the result.

Scarcely had the sound of the captain's footsteps died away than they heard many hoarse voices, and the trampling of heavy feet.

Before they had time to speculate upon this occurrence, the casks in which the fugitives were concealed were turned over on to their sides, and then rolled to a considerable distance, much to their personal discomfiture.

But they were mindful of the injunctions they had received from the captain, and remained perfectly silent.

When the casks had been rolled to a certain spot, they were set up on end again.

They were then allowed to remain.

But a terrific lumbering followed, for which the words of the captain had in part prepared them.

This continued for some time, but what it meant they could not form the least idea.

Suddenly, however, they were startled by hearing a loud voice say:

"Aho—ahoy! Below there! All hands on deck!"

CHAPTER CCCCX.

THE RIVER POLICE ARE BAFLED BY THE INGENUITY OF THE CAPTAIN OF THE SAUCY KATE.

A CLOUD of mystery completely enveloped the Saucy Kate, and Blueskin was one of those who failed to penetrate it.

What was the meaning of what had just taken place he could not conceive.

But though he was so entirely in the dark, there is no reason why the reader should be, and therefore, before we proceed any further, we will explain some of the mysteries connected with this vessel.

In the first place, she was, as may have been expected, a smuggler.

With all the details of this, however, we will not trouble

the reader, for they have no immediate connection with our story.

Let it suffice to say that the hiding-place at the bottom of the vessel—and which was so cleverly concealed as to absolutely defy detection—had been constructed for the purpose of storing lace and silk goods, or other articles of great value that are comprised in a small compass.

We have seen that it was quite large enough to contain Edgworth Bess, for it was empty, its contents having been cleverly disposed of some time before.

We may state that the Saucy Kate was looked upon as a vessel sailing between London and Amsterdam, and engaged in legitimate trade.

And this was the case, but she did a little smuggling safely and quietly, thus differing from those vessels that openly professed to do nothing else but cheat the Customs.

On the present occasion, the Saucy Kate was making a return voyage, and had no contraband articles whatever on board, being freighted with strong ale, which was to be delivered at Amsterdam.

The Thames police had some suspicions of her, but no positive information.

The captain was now in a position to laugh them to scorn, should they board his vessel.

The hiding-place in which Edgworth Bess was bestowed had escaped detection many times when a close search had been made, and therefore it was only fair to infer that it would do so on the present occasion.

But the captain resolved to make assurance doubly sure.

Blueskin, too, and Ned Cantle might be said to be perfectly safe.

The captain, however, had more than a desire to save them for their own sakes alone, though he was willing enough.

But it was manifestly to his interest to do so, for if the fugitives were discovered concealed on board his vessel, the consequences would be most serious to him, as he would at once be connected with some daring offenders against the laws.

What we have just said will be quite sufficient to make clear how highly important it was to his interests to conceal the fugitives effectually; and the means which he adopted were well calculated to achieve the end in view.

After leaving Ned Cantle in the cask, the captain hastened on to the deck, where he gave some hasty instructions to about half a dozen of his crew, who disappeared at once into the interior of the vessel.

In accordance with the commands they had received, they rolled the two casks containing Blueskin and Ned Cantle from their present position, and placed them upon end immediately above the hiding-place where Edgworth Bess lay.

This done, they set to work upon the full casks, and removing them from where they stood, stacked them up in rows, until the two containing our friends were quite hidden from view.

Long practice had made these men skilful in handling these large casks, and they performed their arduous labour with great ease and rapidity.

In much less time than one would have considered possible for the performance of such an amount of work, they had removed the whole of the casks, and stacked them up in a manner that would prevent all suspicion of their having been removed.

In the meantime, let us see what was going on on deck.

After issuing his orders to the men, the captain looked towards the boat containing the river police, and found that it was much nearer than before.

Several shots had been fired, doubtless as signals for the Saucy Kate to heave-to; but no notice had been taken of them.

The captain took a telescope, and had a good look at the vessel in chase.

She was coming along at an alarming rate, and even as the captain gazed another pistol was fired.

He saw the flash of blue smoke, and then the next moment the report reverberated over the sunlit waters.

After noting the distance between them, the captain shook his head, and muttered:

"We are not ready to heave-to yet; but we will reply to their signal, and that will give us time."

He took a pistol from his pocket as he uttered these words, and fired.

It was a large holster pistol, and the report sounded with great effect.

Scarcely had the echoes died away than it was replied to by another shot from the police vessel, after which there could be no reasonable pretence for not attending to the order to heave-to.

The captain therefore was compelled to issue the necessary directions to his men, though he would fain have put it off a little while.

Still a considerable distance intervened between the two vessels, and some time would necessarily have to elapse before the police could board.

Before then, the captain hoped that all his arrangements would be completed.

The *Saucy Kate* was now brought-to, and her rapid motion was exchanged for a dull, plunging movement.

The captain watched the approach of the pursuing vessel with great interest, and he could not repress a certain amount of admiration when he saw how skilfully she was handled.

At length the police vessel was near enough to be hailed, and the captain resolved to boldly take the lead in the affair.

Seizing a speaking-trumpet, he placed it to his lips, and shouted:

"Boat ahoy! Who are you?"

There was an immediate commotion on board the other vessel, and then a voice replied:

"His Majesty's Thames Police! Heave-to!"

"Heave-to it is! Do you want to come on board?"

"Yes!"

"All right!"

No more was said, and the police rapidly approached.

The two vessels were now very close together—so close that they could see on to each other's decks.

A few more minutes only would have to elapse, and then they would be alongside.

It was at this juncture that the captain passed the word for all hands to come on deck.

He was obeyed with true naval promptitude, and shortly had the satisfaction of learning that his instructions had been fully and completely carried out.

This took a great load off his heart, and he advanced to meet the officers with a smiling face.

As the two vessels touched, ropes were thrown, and they were made fast to each other.

Sword in hand, the officer in command sprang on board the *Saucy Kate*.

He was well backed up by his men.

"What's amiss?" asked the captain, with well-affected astonishment.

"You need not ask that question! We want three fugitives from justice who got on board your vessel while you were in the Pool. Save all bother by giving them up. It will be your best plan!"

The captain shook his head.

"Don't be such a fool," continued the officer, "as to pretend that you know nothing about it! If you are wise, you will keep yourself out of trouble by giving them up at once!"

"Who do you want?"

"You know very well who I want; but I see you are not inclined to act openly with me as you might do, and so I shall search the vessel at once. If I find them, I warn you the consequences will be serious to yourself!"

"If you are in search of any persons who have got on board in the Pool, you will not find them. You are in some error. I have only my own crew on board."

This was said in a tone of voice that staggered the officer; for, be it remembered, he had only a suspicion that the fugitives were on board.

Nevertheless, he did not allow the effect of the captain's words to be visible, but said:

"I can't take you at your word. Your conduct has been altogether very suspicious."

"As how, sir? As how?" asked the captain.

"Why did you not attend to our signal, in the first place, and lay-to?"

"We did lay-to."

"But not till after great delay."

"Well, I know nothing about that. I was down in the cabin, and upon receiving a report I came on deck. I could not make you out to be river police, however. The vessel was the reason of that!"

"There may be something in what you say. We got this vessel at a moment's notice, in order to continue the pursuit, our own boat having been dashed to pieces against London Bridge. But that is neither here nor there. I have my suspicions, and I do not intend to cast off until I have searched your vessel thoroughly in every part."

"Very good, sir. I don't wish to hinder you in the slightest. You have my full permission to search as much as ever you think proper; but, if you find anything on board besides my own crew and the hogsheads of ale which form the cargo, I will take the consequences!"

"You will have to do that, rely upon it. Now, my men, keep a sharp look-out around you! Half a dozen follow me!"

Six men rose up and followed their officer, who at once descended into the interior of the vessel.

Here they dispersed themselves, and every corner was rigidly searched.

But all was straightforward, and just as it should be. At last they descended into the hold, where they saw the casks stored up in the manner we have described.

To have removed these casks would have been a greater amount of labour than the officer would have been justified in taking.

The casks were, however, tapped with the butt-ends of pistols; but the uniform dull sound that was produced showed at once that they were filled with liquor.

But although they did not remove these casks, they searched all round and about them; for the police were not slow to perceive that they would form capital hiding-places.

Nothing, however, was found, and so, after a great deal more searching, they came on deck.

The captain now began to congratulate himself that he should be able to get rid of his unwelcome visitors, but he was disappointed.

As he came up the ladder on to the deck, a brilliant idea entered the head of the officer in command.

He fancied the three fugitives were on board, but that they were disguised as part of the captain's crew.

He resolved to satisfy himself upon this point.

He was sure no one was below, and when he came on deck the men were all standing in a throng engaged in conversation.

The captain came towards him as soon as he appeared, but that worthy could tell by the expression of his face that there was something more in store.

"This is the *Saucy Kate*, is it not?" asked the officer, when the captain approached.

"Yes, sir, it is," was the reply, given civilly and respectfully enough.

"What is the number of your crew?"

"Fourteen."

"Does that include yourself?"

"No."

"Very good. Smithson!"

"Yes, sir," said one of the police.

"Go down into the cabin with the captain, and come back with the ship's book. We will have the crew mustered."

The captain's eye twinkled when he heard this order, because he knew very well the police officer was on a wrong scent.

He followed Smithson down into the cabin, and gave him the ship's book, containing the names of the crew.

He quickly returned with it.

The officer first of all ran his eye down the list of names.

They were fourteen in number, so in that respect the captain spoke truth.

He could tell, too, by the appearance of the roll that the register had not been meddled with.

Had the *ruse* which he suspected had been put into execution, he would have infallibly detected it.

The captain was contented enough.

One by one the officer called out the names as they stood on the book, and as he did so the men came forward and answered, and then stood apart.

When he had done, the officer found that the number of the crew was quite correct.

Nothing, therefore, was left for him to do, but to admit that his suspicions were groundless, and to take his departure.

He did this with a very bad grace indeed, and got into his boat along with his men with a discomfited air.

No other course of action was open to him, however.

He was compelled to go, and he had satisfied himself by a rigid personal examination that those he sought were not on board.

Reluctantly he gave the order to cast off.

His men were not less sullen than himself, for it seemed pretty evident that they had taken all their trouble for nothing.

Having made so great a mistake as to suppose the fugitives were on board the Saucy Kate, they imagined all hope of achieving their purpose was at an end.

The fugitives doubtless were far enough off by this time.

Such were the thoughts that filled their minds as they cast off.

They quickly dropped astern, and the order was given for the Saucy Kate to get under-weigh.

When the commanding officer saw her spread her white sails to the breeze, the fancy somehow or other came over his mind that the thousand pounds offered by Wild were drifting away.

Minute as his search had been, he now grew doubtful of it.

His feelings were shared in by his crew, and to such an extent, that it was agreed that, as they could not possibly do any good by returning to London, they would take their course down the river so as to keep the Saucy Kate full in view.

CHAPTER CCCCXXI.

EDGORTH BESS IS RESCUED AT A CRITICAL MOMENT, AND THE THAMES POLICE STILL KEEP IN THE WAKE OF THE SAUCY KATE.

ONCE more, then, did our friends have occasion to congratulate themselves upon having had another narrow escape from their foes.

It was not until he had got the Saucy Kate fairly under-weigh, and had left the police vessel far astern, that the captain ventured to release our friends from their place of imprisonment.

Then he descended.

First, however, the casks had to be removed; but this was at length happily accomplished, and Blueskin and Ned Cantle were released from the casks in which they had been confined.

They were very much cramped, of course, and generally uncomfortable.

But such minor inconveniences as these they thought nothing of, being heartily glad to find that they had escaped the danger which had threatened them.

Their next care was to release Edgworth Bess, and the casks were removed from over the plank for that purpose.

The lid was then raised.

Ejaculations of surprise and grief came, however, from their lips.

Edgworth Bess was there, but she was lying in her prison as though lifeless.

She presented, indeed, every appearance of a corpse, and of the corpse of one who had died anything but a comfortable death.

Her lips were wide apart and flecked with foam, while her body was drawn up as though from the influence of a spasm of more than mortal agony.

Her hands were tightly clenched and bleeding.

Blueskin staggered back when this horrible spectacle burst upon his vision.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "what can be the meaning of all this?"

"Quick—quick!" said the captain, addressing Ned Cantle, who stood stock-still with surprise—"quick—quick! Help me to raise her and carry her on deck! I see it all now, and I trust we are not too late. That place must have been air-tight, or nearly so, and she has been suffocated!"

The captain had hit upon the true solution of this terrible occurrence.

The little recess was indeed almost air-tight.

It was some time before Edgworth Bess felt the suffocating sensation come over her, but when it did come, it was truly terrible.

She gasped painfully for breath.

Clenching her hands, she struck violently against the coffin-like sides of her hiding-place, and strove to shriek aloud for aid.

But a faint, inarticulate murmur alone came from her lips, and the sound she produced by striking with her fists against the woodwork was so slight, that it was not audible above the plashing of the waves against the sides of the vessel.

Still she continued her frantic efforts, though all she did was to still further exhaust herself.

Blood streamed from her delicate hands as she bruised them against the hard timbers; but she heeded it not.

She continued her exertions with the same vigour.

At last her strength failed her.

Foam gathered about her lips, and dreadful pains racked her limbs.

Then all became a blank.

She was in this death-like state when the officers examined the hold.

In one way it was as well that she had swooned, or some faint sound might have reached the acute ears of those suspicious men.

But all was as silent as the very grave itself.

Ned Cantle sprang forward in a moment to obey the captain's command, which was certainly a good one; for, under the circumstances, nothing better could be done than to take the poor sufferer on to the deck.

Blueskin followed like one stupefied, for he fully believed that the young girl was dead.

Such was not the case, however.

She still lived; though if she had remained much longer in that recess, she would have ceased to exist.

Upon getting her on deck, every attention was paid to her, and ere long they had the satisfaction of seeing her recover from what bore so close a semblance to death itself as to be undistinguishable from it.

The fresh sea air soon had the effect of completely restoring her, though she was very, very weak.

We altogether despair of being able to convey an idea of Blueskin's joy when he saw her once more in life.

"Cheer up!" said the captain—"all is well! In twelve hours at least we shall come in sight of the coast of Holland, that is, if this favourable weather continues. Be of good heart—the danger is past!"

This accident to Edgworth Bess had the effect of driving out of Blueskin's mind the course of action he had decided upon.

How long his forgetfulness would have lasted is hard to say.

It was Edgworth Bess herself who reminded him of it.

He promised to see to it without delay, and started off to confer with the captain.

Of course, the sooner he was put on shore the better, inasmuch as he should arrive in London all the more speedily.

He was already much further down the river than he intended to be, and therefore he resolved to leave as soon as possible.

With this view, he approached the captain and made him acquainted with his intentions.

"It is impossible!" was the reply.

"Impossible? How so?"

"Take this telescope and look through it—that will give you the best answer to your question!"

Not without a certain amount of surprise, Blueskin took the telescope as he had been directed.

"Now!" continued the captain—"just look in our wake, will you, and tell me what you can see?"

Blueskin levelled the instrument in the direction indicated, and, after looking about for a moment, he caught sight of some small object.

He looked at it with more attention, and adjusted the focus of the telescope so as to suit his eye.

He then caught sight of a vessel, upon the white sails of which the morning sun shone with great power and beauty.

She was too far off for her crew to be perceived, and yet there she was, clearly enough following dead in their wake.

"What do you make her out to be?" asked the captain, after a pause.

"I cannot make her out to be anything else but a vessel!"

"You do not recognise her, then?"

"No!"

"It is the vessel containing the river police, who paid us a visit a little while ago!"

"Then they are retreating?"

"Nothing of the kind! They have evidently changed their course. They have tacked round."

"Are they following us?"

"Yes! and they manage to keep just about the same distance in the rear."

"But what can be their motive?"

"That is best known to themselves."

"Cannot you hazard a guess?"

"Well, yes! If I am to give my opinion, it is this—they are not altogether satisfied with their search, and are following us in the hope of being able to make out something."

"Do you think so?"

"I feel pretty well sure of it. So you see now how it is that it is impossible for you to land—at any rate, just at present. I have no doubt they are watching us closely with their glasses, and they would at once perceive you put off in a boat. No, it must not be thought of just at present!"

"But at night?" urged Blueskin.

"Well, that will be another matter; but I fancy we shall be fairly out to sea by that time. We must wait and see, however; perhaps we shall tire the patience of those gentlemen yonder!"

This was but a poor consolation, though. Blueskin could see very plainly that it would never do to attempt to effect a landing, for, if he did, their position would be dangerous in the extreme.

He did not make Edgworth Bess acquainted with the exact state of affairs, but simply told her that at present it would be unsafe for him to land, as the vessel containing the police officers was in sight; but he assured her that he would go on shore at the first opportunity.

With this the poor girl was obliged to be content, though she shed tears of bitter anguish when she thought of Jack Sheppard's terrible situation.

The Saucy Kate was now under full sail, and scudding over the smooth surface of the Thames before a brisk wind.

Still, as they looked back from time to time, they could perceive the police vessel apparently just the same distance in the rear.

Blueskin himself was not a whit less anxious than Edgworth Bess.

Fain would he, at all risks, have made his way to the shore, and hastened on to London, for he felt that Jack stood greatly in need of his aid and assistance.

But while the present state of things continued it was impossible.

As the Thames grew wider and wider, and of necessity the shore more and more distant, Blueskin's anxiety increased.

Then he noticed, too, that the wind increased greatly in force, though it was still nothing more than what a sailor would call a stiff and favourable breeze.

If the force of the wind, however, continued to increase, that breeze would soon become a gale.

As a matter of course, the speed of the Saucy Kate was much increased, but the wind enabled the police to maintain the same distance.

Blueskin was in despair.

He wished the speed of the vessel to be retarded, not accelerated.

At length, so much did the breeze increase that it was found necessary to take in some of the sails.

And now a preternatural darkness began to spread itself over the surface of the water.

Clouds began to pile themselves up in the sky, and the waves had a strange lurid tint.

The air, too, became perceptibly colder.

More sail was now taken in, but still the Saucy Kate ploughed the waters at a furious rate.

Darker and darker grew the sky, and the weather portents became more and more ominous.

Blueskin had all this time been watching the vessel in the rear, but now he rose to his feet with the intention of seeking out the captain.

He found him, with an unusually grave-looking face, watching the clouds above.

"What is your opinion of the weather?" asked Blueskin, eagerly.

The captain shook his head.

"If I am any judge in such matters, we shall have a rougher night than has been known upon this coast for years."

"What shall you do?"

"Keep right ahead. The storm will be much worse near the land than it will be out in the Northern Ocean."

"Where are we now?"

"Just beyond Sheerness. If the gale will only hold off a little while, we shall be well out at sea, and then I shall care little, for the Saucy Kate is a good vessel, and has braved many a storm."

With these words, the captain moved off to give some necessary directions to his crew.

Blueskin looked about him with a heavy and foreboding heart.

Fate seemed set against his return to London.

To think of landing now was nothing short of madness, and so he said not a word further upon the subject.

Indeed, his whole attention was absorbed by the state of the weather.

The wind still continued to blow steadily from one point, and the Saucy Kate flew on before the breeze like some light bird.

But the clouds got thicker and thicker.

They gradually spread themselves until they covered the whole face of the firmament.

The sea looked white and angry.

The captain was continuously employed in giving orders to the men for the management of the ship.

To do this he was compelled to use the speaking-trumpet, for the wind had now increased to such an extent that he could scarcely make his own voice heard above it.

As they got further and further from the land, the violence of the wind and waves increased, until presently there came from behind one of the clouds a vivid flash of lightning.

For a moment every object for miles round could be distinctly seen, and then double darkness followed.

Then came an awful rattling peal of thunder.

The storm had now begun in earnest.

CHAPTER CCCCXXII.

JACK SHEPPARD AWAKES AND FINDS HIMSELF THE INMATE OF A NEWGATE CELL, AND JONATHAN WILD DICTATES A LETTER TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

LET us once more take a peep at the interior of Newgate.

It is to that strong room in which Jack Sheppard is confined that we would wish to direct the attention of the reader.

The time is the day succeeding the night upon which Jack Sheppard was again made the inmate of the gloomy City prison.

That same day when Edgworth Bess and Blueskin on the Thames were in so perilous a position.

It was a bright, beautiful, sunshiny day that made even dingy London streets look pleasant, but no rays of the glorious sunlight made their way into the strong room.

It was but a dim reflected light that at the best of times made its way through the grated windows, and on the present occasion all that told of the brilliancy of the sun was a slight increase in the reflected light.

Jonathan Wild had so far been as good as his word.

He had not left that strong room for an instant.

With the jar of brandy by his side, he had sat with his bleared and bloodshot eyes fixed upon his victim.

Scarcely had he for an instant relaxed the fixity of his gaze.

He watched Jack Sheppard as some wild animal might be expected to watch some unusually tempting and delicate prey.

At the slightest movement that was made by the unconscious prisoner, he would start violently, and lay his hand upon his pistol.

But up to the present time the movements Jack had made consisted merely in rolling over restlessly, or moving his arms above his head.

He had not yet awakened to the knowledge of where he was.

It seemed so strange that Jonathan Wild should adhere closely to the resolution he had expressed.

One would have thought that, seeing the condition of his prisoner, he would have left him for a brief space of time, while he paid a visit to his own house.

But no—Jonathan never moved.

Whatever desire he might have felt to view the ruins of his habitation he repressed.

He seemed to forget everything in his one great purpose.

It absorbed all.

This proved, then, that he was fully in earnest in what he had said.

He had learned with comparative indifference the condition of his son, and when asked if he would like to see him, as he was merely in the prison, he returned a snarling negative, at the same time repeating the resolution he had made.

This, indeed, was carrying out his intentions to the very letter, for he need not have been absent more than a few minutes for this purpose.

Whether time would have the effect of relaxing this rigid adherence to his resolution remains to be seen.

His self-imposed imprisonment had not yet lasted long enough for the novelty to wear off and to become tiresome.

Such a ghastly and horrible-looking object as the thief-taker was at this time had probably never been seen in Newgate.

His whole aspect was frightful in the extreme, and now his countenance was inflamed by the quantity of brandy he had drunk.

But this was apparently the only effect which the fiery stimulant produced upon him.

The thief-taker had partaken of a slight breakfast which had been brought to him in the cell, and since that time he had remained alone with his victim, and undisturbed.

What were his reflections during this period would indeed be hard to say.

The only interruption he had had was caused by Mr. Snoxall, who called to look at his new patient.

He declared Jack to be in a sound and deep slumber, which would strengthen and do him more good than all the drugs in the world.

After the departure of the apothecary, Wild had taken another deep draught of brandy, and then resumed his meditations and watching.

Towards mid-day the character of Jack's sleep changed. It no longer continued tranquil and trance-like, as it had done.

He moved about wildly, and uttered incoherent cries.

He was dreaming, and going through the transactions of the night before.

He muttered incessantly, and Jonathan endeavoured to catch his meaning.

In this manner the thief-taker discovered that he and Blueskin had broken into the house, and, having first robbed it, had set fire to it.

The words which he kept uttering induced Wild to rise and make an examination of the prisoner's pockets.

In them he found ample confirmation of Jack's mutterings.

He recognised the different articles as he rapidly brought them into view with all the dexterity of an accomplished pickpocket.

He could tell just what part of his house had been rifled, and he swore horribly as he transferred the valuables to his own pocket, leaving Jack without anything at all.

This done, Wild shrank back in his seat and awaited the awakening of his victim.

This would, he felt sure, ere long take place, and he looked forward with evident gratification to the moment when Jack should first discover where he was.

As he had expected, he had not long to wait.

Soon after noon had passed, Jack opened his eyes.

At first Wild did not know this, for Jack lay with his face turned towards the wall.

As might be supposed, he was at first only in a semi-conscious state.

He looked about him dreamingly, evidently not knowing where he was.

His whole mind was a blank to him.

But by degrees his memory came back to him, and almost unconsciously he found himself striving to recollect what had last happened to him.

For a time he was baffled, but by beginning at a certain point, he was able to proceed up to the time when he had stood on the muddy shore and endeavoured to push the boat into the stream.

But he could go no further.

After that memory seemed annihilated.

In vain he strove to force his remembrance further.

Then, naturally enough, he began to wonder where he was and what had happened to him.

How was it, he asked himself, that he was lying there without being able to remember anything about it?

He was bewildered.

And while these thoughts were chasing themselves rapidly through his brain, he remained perfectly still.

By degrees, however, he began to realise that there was before him a rough stone wall.

Then he wondered again where he could be, with a stone wall so near to him.

Strangely enough, he never surmised for a moment that he was once more an inmate of Newgate.

That contingency was so terrible a one, however, that it never once occurred to him.

He resolved to look further.

It is easy to account for his dreamy state, and the want of energy he displayed, by the quantity of blood which he had lost from his wound.

By degrees, however, he grew stronger.

He glanced upward at the wall without turning his head in the least.

Still nothing but the rough stone wall met his gaze.

Then, like a lightning's flash, the idea entered his mind that he was either dreaming or else the inmate of a cell in Newgate.

It could not be the former.

He was quite sure that he was wide awake.

It was too horrible to think the latter.

And yet it must be so!

With a scream he raised himself upon the bed, though only slightly, for he found himself almost destitute of strength.

But the one hasty glance which he cast around convinced him that his worst forebodings were realised.

The rough walls, the arched roof, the heavy iron door, and the grated window, they could not possibly belong to any other place than a cell in Newgate.

It was at this moment that a horrible, low, chuckling laugh broke upon his ear.

Instinctively and involuntarily he turned his head in the direction from which the sound proceeded.

For one moment his eyes met those of his mortal foe gleaming upon him.

The same glance revealed the hideous face and form of the thief-taker, from whose lips the chuckling sound had come.

Jack Sheppard, as soon as he caught sight of him, uttered a scream.

For a moment his lost strength came back to him.

That one glance at his enemy seemed to make him acquainted with all that had taken place.

With the scream we have mentioned still trembling on his lips, Jack Sheppard sprang from the rude bed.

Jonathan Wild started up with his pistol in his hand.

But this alarm was needless.

The prisoner's sudden accession of strength vanished as quickly as it came.

He staggered for a moment, and then fell to the floor of the cell.

There was a man outside the door who was, by the directions of the Governor, stationed there on guard, and now he made his appearance.

By his aid, Jack was raised, and unresistingly laid at full length upon the bed.

But Jack had not lost his consciousness this time.

It was his body that had failed him, not his mind.

He knew perfectly well what they were about, but he could not, for the life of him, make a single movement.

Oh, that was a horrible situation to be placed in!

To have the body like a mass of inert clay, and the mind strong within.

He could not even move his lips enough to speak, so thoroughly prostrated was he.



EDGORTH BESS, BLUESKIN, AND NED CANTLE ESCAPE FROM THE BURNING VESSEL.

But his brightly gleaming eyes showed what his feelings were.

With what words could we hope to convey to the reader an idea of Jack Sheppard's mind at this moment?

How awful, under the circumstances we have mentioned, must have been his feelings when he found himself, after all his pains, once more the inmate of a Newgate cell, and with his deadly enemy, Jonathan Wild, watching over him!

And to be so powerless as he was, too!

Oh, his heart swelled almost to bursting!

His brain burned, and he felt almost as though he should go mad.

Insanity then might even have been a blessing, and not a curse.

But he was denied the sweet oblivion of madness.

His body destined to lie in that deathlike state, and yet to be in full possession of all his mental faculties!

No. 88.—BLUESKIN.

That was a revenge more deep and subtle than the thief-taker, with all his cunning, had been able to think of.

It is some consolation, though, to be aware of the fact that Wild did not thoroughly comprehend Jack's condition.

Had he done so, his exultation would have been much greater than it was.

He did not think he was able to hear or understand what was going on, and in this belief, after once more glancing in his face, he left him, to resume his old position in the arm-chair by the table.

By degrees Jack grew calmer, but it was not until his mind was almost exhausted.

Then he began to speculate upon all that had occurred, and wondered what had happened to Blueskin and Edgworth Bess after he had fallen.

It was only natural for him to suppose that they had been taken prisoners, like himself.

Probably, at that moment, he thought, they were the occupants of cells adjoining his.

So anxious did he feel upon this point, that if he had possessed the power, he would have addressed himself to Jonathan Wild, and sought to elicit something from him.

But he could not articulate a murmur.

How long he lay thus, a prey to the most bitter thoughts that could agitate one's mind, he knew not, but he was aroused by hearing a slight sound.

A strong effort enabled him to turn his eyes in the direction from whence it came.

Then the door opened, and the Governor of Newgate entered.

He went straight up to the thief-taker, without paying the least attention to the prisoner.

"I am glad you have come!" growled Wild. "I want pen, ink, and paper!"

"All right, Mr. Wild; you shall have them."

The Governor called the man on guard, and then despatched him for the articles named.

A silence ensued during his absence. Meanwhile, Jack lay listening and wondering what was going to take place.

In a few minutes the man returned, and the things were put down on the table.

"Mr. Noakes," said Wild, as soon as the turnkey had withdrawn, "I want you to write a letter, at my dictation."

"Very good, Mr. Wild. I shall be happy to serve you any way that lies in my power."

"Bah! Stuff! I would not have troubled you, only I am in such pain myself. I am suffering the tortures of the damned!"

"That is some consolation," thought Jack, who could bear perfectly all that was said.

"Who do you want the letter written to?" asked the Governor, as he placed the paper before him, and dipped the pen in the ink.

"To the Secretary of State!"

"Very good, Mr. Wild. When you are ready, I am waiting."

"Pour yourself out a drop of brandy, and then we will begin!"

With this command the Governor seemed by no means displeased, and he poured out the liquor, first handing the cup to the thief-taker, and then drinking some himself.

Once again he took up the pen, and then Wild said:

"Head the letter 'Newgate!'"

"It is done!"

"Begin thus:

"Most honourable lord:

"This letter comes from the most humble and obedient of all your honourable lordship's humble and obedient servants!"

"Have you done that?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Go on, then:

"The matter upon which I make bold to address your honourable lordship is a most important one, which, it is hoped, will be my excuse for so doing. I have the satisfaction of informing you that, early this morning, I was fortunate enough to re-capture that daring, double-dyed villain, Jack Sheppard, the housebreaker. It was not without receiving many grievous hurts that I succeeded in effecting his capture. But I did succeed, in spite of the personal consequences to myself! The rascal would have escaped, in a boat which he was just pushing off from the shore, if I had not levelled one of my pistols at him, and brought him down. He is wounded, but not dangerously, though he is in a state of great weakness. From this he will shortly recover, and I have to pray that your honourable lordship will order his execution to take place as soon as ever he is well enough for the performance of the ceremony. In the meantime, in order to guard against the possibility of his making another escape, I have placed myself in his cell, where it is my intention to remain until I see him led out for execution. He has burned my house down, and I have sustained grievous bodily injury at his hands; but, if your honourable lordship will attend to the humble petition of your obedient servant, and have him executed as soon as he is strong enough, I will be responsible for his safe keeping in the meantime, and will guarantee that he does not make another escape."

CHAPTER CCCCXXIII.

THE WARRANT FOR THE EXECUTION OF JACK SHEPPARD ARRIVES AT NEWGATE.

THUS far, Mr. Wild.

He paused, and then said:

"Have you got that much, Mr. Noakes?"

"Yes."

"Read it to me, then."

The Governor of Newgate obeyed.

Jonathan listened with the greatest complacency, and then continued:

"I think that will do very well indeed. You can just put my name at the bottom of it."

"Very good, Mr. Wild. It is done."

"Seal it, then, and let it be delivered at once. Let the bearer wait, and, if possible, return with a reply."

"It shall be done."

"Be off at once, then."

This was all the thanks the Governor got for the trouble he had taken.

He hastily left the cell, however, and the precious missive was immediately dispatched.

All this Jack Sheppard had plainly heard, and fully understood.

Jonathan Wild intended that he should do so.

He drank deeply of the brandy that was before him, and waited with impatient silence for the return of the messenger.

He had a long time to wait.

By slow degrees the faint glimmer of light that penetrated into the cell faded away.

Darkness came on rapidly, and soon had hid the thief-taker's victim from his view.

But Jonathan, in defiance of all the rules and regulations of the prison, vociferously demanded a light.

He was supplied with a candle, though the Governor protested against it.

But it was no good.

Once more, then, was the immovable form of Jack Sheppard revealed to the view of his implacable enemy.

The rays of the candle were insufficient to illuminate the whole of the gloomy dungeon, but still it was much better than the absolute darkness which had before prevailed.

At length, worn out by watching and waiting, Jonathan fell off into a doze, to which the silence, the darkness, and his own fatigue and weakness made him the more disposed.

The slight noise made by the insertion of the key into the lock of the cell door was sufficient to arouse him thoroughly, and he looked about him with his eyes wide open.

The next moment the door was flung open on its hinges, and the Governor entered.

In his hand he held an open paper, which was evidently an official communication of some kind.

"What is the reply to my letter?" he asked, furiously.

"Speak! Tell me at once! How has the Secretary of State answered my letter?"

"In the best possible manner that he could have answered it!" returned Mr. Noakes, in a triumphant tone of voice.

"How—how?"

"Why look! Here is the warrant for the execution of—"

Jonathan Wild interrupted him with a shriek before he could pronounce the name.

The Governor started back in surprise, though he was tolerably well used to the thief-taker's pleasant little eccentricities.

But this shriek was truly of such an awful character that it staggered even him.

"For whom, dolt?" roared Wild—"for whom?"

"For Jack Sheppard."

"Ha, ha, ha! At last—at last! Give it to me! Let me look at it!—let me satisfy myself that there is no delusion!"

Jonathan snatched the missive from the hands of the Governor of Newgate as he spoke.

One glance, however, was quite enough to assure him that there was no mistake.

His triumph knew no bounds.

With the warrant still in his hand, he strode across the cell to the rude bench upon which Jack Sheppard lay.

Wild touched his victim on the shoulder rather roughly as he said, or rather shrieked:

"Ha, ha! Who has gained the contest? Look here, Jack—look here, and let your eyes ache at the sight! The Secretary of State has replied to my letter with a greater promptitude than I had expected. Here is the warrant for your execution!"

He waved the document exultingly before the prisoner's face.

"But what date is fixed for the execution, Mr. Wild?" the Governor ventured to ask, after a pause.

"Bring the light here, and let me look!"

Mr. Noakes sprang forward and took the candle off the table himself.

Then he hastened to the thief-taker with it, and held it in such a manner that the light fell upon the warrant.

Jonathan glanced his eye over it.

The contents of such documents were familiar enough to him, and he did not stop to read it, but contented himself with looking for the date.

"Monday!" he cried. "Hurrah! Monday is the day! That will soon be here! What day is it to day?"

"Friday."

"Ha, ha! I thought so! I ought to have said what night is it! Three more nights and two more days, and then—The Secretary has been prompt indeed!"

It seemed very doubtful, however, whether Jack would be well enough so soon.

If not, the execution would take place when he was.

But Jonathan determined to have some conversation with Mr. Snoxall upon the subject.

The thief-taker's elation, consequent upon the arrival of the warrant, lasted for some time, but at length he exhausted himself, and sank down upon a chair again, while he refreshed himself with some more draughts at the brandy bottle.

Can the reader picture to himself what the feelings of Jack Sheppard were?

Powerless to move a muscle, yet he had heard and perfectly understood what had taken place.

He knew he was to be hanged on Monday.

Monday!

In two days' time.

What was to be done?

Was it possible that he was now doomed to meet that ignominious fate which had so long threatened him, but which he had so successfully eluded so far.

He could look for no help from himself.

There was no hope now—no, not the slightest hope of being able to make his escape.

Even had he the strength—which he had not—it would have been impossible.

While Jonathan Wild remained in the cell with him—and from his ferocious, bloodthirsty manner Jack Sheppard felt certain he would be as good as his word—he would not be able to take a single step towards effecting his freedom.

These were terrible reflections, and Jack felt them to be so.

His case, he thought, would not have been so desperate were it not for his state of utter prostration.

And yet, had he been unwounded, he could not conceal the conviction from his mind that he would have been heavily chained, and the least attempt he had made to free himself from the thraldom of his fetters would be noticed by Jonathan Wild.

And so, probably for the very first time in his life, Jack Sheppard fully realised the meaning of the word despair.

Despair of the most awful character which can possibly be conceived took possession of his mind.

Turn in what direction he would, he could not see the feeblest glimmer of hope.

All was dark.

Not only was he helpless, and watched by his implacable foe, but he was without the prospect of anyone else being able to afford the least help to him.

Jack had settled in his own mind that Blueskin and Edgworth Bess had been taken prisoners at the same time as himself.

Such being the case, it was quite useless for him to hope to receive from his faithful ally and coadjutor the slightest assistance.

He doubtless was as zealously guarded as himself.

"It would be out of Blueskin's power to help himself," he thought, "and so it is folly for me to think that he would be able to help me."

Thus, then, was Jack driven to look his ignominious fate sternly in the face.

His mind and spirits were crushed by the thought of the impossibility of an escape.

In a space of time so short that he could count the hours he would take his last look at the world from Tyburn Tree.

Had he possessed the power, he would have writhed upon his rude couch as these agonising thoughts passed through his mind.

In the meanwhile, Jonathan had dropped off into one of his cat-like dozes with which he had indulged himself during the time he was in the cell.

Apparently he was sound asleep; and so he was, but the slightest possible sound would have aroused him in a moment.

His mind was now content.

Had the execution of Jack Sheppard rested wholly and entirely in his own hands, he could not have fixed an earlier date than Monday.

The only doubt he had, was that Jack would not be well enough so soon.

The only point upon which Jonathan was at all uneasy, was that he had secured no intelligence respecting the capture of Blueskin and Edgworth Bess.

And yet he could scarcely bring himself to believe that they had escaped the Thames police, more especially when he recollected how large a reward he had offered them as a stimulant to make the utmost exertions.

And yet he was without the least intelligence whatever.

The capture of Blueskin and Edgworth Bess was secondary only in importance to the capture of Jack Sheppard.

Jonathan, however, firmly resisted the temptation to divert his attention from the prisoner before him.

It was not long to Monday, he told himself, and then he should be quite at liberty.

This prospect was a consoling one, and so, as we have said, the thief-taker dropped off into a doze.

It was not long before Jack Sheppard closed his eyes in sleep as well.

The silence of the place, broken only by the snores of the thief-taker, the darkness dispelled only by the tallow candle which from want of attention gave hardly any illumination at all, and the harassing nature of his thoughts—all these circumstances combined to throw Jack Sheppard into a deep slumber.

It was a slumber very different to Jonathan Wild's, for the report of a pistol would hardly have awakened Jack.

And so the long hours of the night passed by, and morning came at length.

The candle had burned out, and Jonathan was unconscious of it.

When he awoke, the dim daylight was struggling through the grated window of the cell.

His first glance was towards the bench.

When he saw Jack lying there still and motionless as ever, his mind was much relieved.

Feeling some slight gnawing of hunger at his stomach, Wild vociferously called for breakfast.

The man outside the cell entered and promised it should be sent for.

When the breakfast came in, the Governor of the prison entered too, for he was anxious in the extreme that Jack should be kept in safety.

"He is asleep, Mr. Wild," said the Governor, glancing at Jack.

"All right, then! Let him alone. When you see Mr. Snoxall, send him to me."

"Here he is."

And in effect the apothecary entered the cell.

He went up to his patient, and looked at him for some time in silence.

Then, having seen that the bandages had not shifted from their position, he approached the thief-taker.

"Well?" said Wild, inquiringly.

"Not quite well, Mr. Wild," said Snoxall, with a feeble smile—"not quite well, but he is much better."

"Much better, say you?"

"Yes."

"When will he be well?"

"That greatly depends upon circumstances."

"Come now, Mr. Snoxall, you and I ought to understand each other by this time."

The apothecary bowed, and murmured an assent.

"Well, then, you will find it the best day's work you ever did in all your life if you get Jack Sheppard well by Sunday night."

"Why?"

"Why? Because the Secretary of State has issued orders for his execution to take place on Monday."

"Make your mind easy, Mr. Wild; there is really very little the matter with him—weakness is the chief. When he awakes from this sound sleep, a great improvement will be visible, and then all you have got to do is to give him plenty of strengthening things."

"Do you hear, Noakes?" said Wild.

"I do."

"See to it, then!"

"Jack Sheppard overheard the whole of this conversation, though he pretended to be asleep."

The fact was, Mr. Snoxall woke him when moving the clothes to ascertain whether the bandage was in its proper place or not.

CHAPTER CCCCXXIV.

THE SAUCY KATE MAKES HER LAST VOYAGE.

LOUDER and louder grew the wind—higher and higher rose the angry billows.

The thunder rolled with almost ceaseless reverberations, so rapidly did one peal succeed another.

The whole waste of waters was revealed by the continuous flashes of the blue and vivid lightning.

Far as the eye could see, the ocean was covered with a white, yeasty froth, while the wind blew with such unremitting violence that it seemed as though it must of necessity carry all before it.

The Saucy Kate, although every inch of canvas had been taken in, and the masts alone left standing, flew over the water like some bird.

Now down—down deep in the trough of the sea—descending so swiftly that it seemed as though she was about to plunge to the bottom of the ocean, and then up on the top of some high wave, with the water continually breaking over her, went the gallant vessel.

The captain of the Saucy Kate was anxious and alarmed.

All he could do was to stand out to sea, and keep his vessel's head in that direction.

But out at sea the tempest seemed to rage with a thousand times more fury; and so perhaps it did; but while there was no fear of running on to the coast.

Edgworth Bess was below, in the cabin, faint and ill.

The exciting occurrences which had so recently taken place had proved too much for her.

Blueskin and Ned Cantle both persisted in remaining upon deck, though the captain endeavoured to persuade them to shut themselves up in the cabin.

They had two or three narrow escapes from being washed overboard, and in the end they were compelled to lash themselves to the spars.

Here they awaited the result of the storm.

The Saucy Kate was a strong, sea-worthy craft, and had weathered many a storm before, and rode safely into port; but the one which now raged threatened to test her powers to the utmost.

The man at the wheel resolutely kept the vessel's head in the direction they wished to take.

And so for two hours the storm continued to rage with unabated violence.

One mast had been carried away, and threatened the destruction of the good ship; but the crew were prompt in their actions, and in a short time, by the aid of their axes, the vessel was freed from this dangerous encumbrance.

Then the Saucy Kate righted herself, and once more continued on her way.

"If we can only weather the storm," said the captain, "we shall make a quicker passage to Amsterdam than ever was known before."

"But shall we weather it?"

"I hope so."

Blueskin felt all a landsman's apprehension.

Besides, he wanted to get back to London.

His mind was in a state of feverish excitement.

But how would he have been had he precisely known Jack Sheppard's situation.

He thought he had made the worst of it; but what would have been his feelings had he known that Jonathan Wild had procured a warrant for the execution of his comrade on the following Monday.

It was quite useless to work himself up to such a fever of excitement as he did, but he could not help it.

He was entirely at the mercy of the wind and waves, and he was powerless to control either the one or the other.

Another hour passed.

The Saucy Kate had received many severe injuries, but the storm now showed signs of abatement.

The captain's hopes began to rise.

Suddenly, however, a dreadful cry was raised—a cry which struck terror to the hearts of the boldest of those who heard it—the most terrible cry that can be heard at sea.

It was fire.

"Fire—fire!" shrieked some one, and then the cry was echoed by many lips.

The captain sprang forward.

His cheeks were paler now than they had yet been.

He found the dreadful intelligence only too true.

They had escaped one peril only to fall into another.

By what means the fire had originated, or how long it had been burning none could tell.

But this is not to be wondered at when it is recollected how the attention of everybody had been absorbed in managing the vessel.

Evidently the fire had been burning a long time, for it had taken a firm hold of the interior.

Attention had first been attracted to it by quantities of smoke pouring up the companion-ladder.

Now flames mingled with the smoke, and poured out of the hatchway as out of some huge furnace.

At the first intimation of the fire that was raging below, Blueskin unbound himself from the spar, and rushed towards the hatchway.

It was his intention to have descended, but he shrunk back.

Where the ladder had been was now a pit of fire.

Blueskin uttered a groan.

As a measure of precaution, he had locked Edgworth Bess in the cabin, in order to prevent her from getting into danger by coming on deck.

That precaution threatened to prove her destruction.

In a few words Blueskin made the captain acquainted with the facts of the case.

"Quick, my men!" he cried. "Bring your axes here!"

Half a dozen men sprang forward in obedience to this command, and commenced cutting through the deck, in order to reach the cabin in that manner.

Blueskin saw there was hope yet if they were speedy in their movements, so he seized an axe himself and assisted.

In a few moments a large hole was made through the deck into the cabin.

Blueskin jumped down instantly.

But he found the place was full of suffocating smoke, and he gasped painfully for breath.

He strove to call aloud, but in vain.

Fortunately, he had the presence of mind to sink down upon his hands and knees.

Close to the floor of the cabin the air was comparatively free from smoke, and he could breathe with tolerable freedom.

As soon as he recovered himself sufficiently to do so, he called aloud upon Edgworth Bess.

But he received no reply.

Then he groped about the floor, and in a moment or so found her lying insensible near the door of the cabin.

To raise her in his arms was the work of a second only.

The cabin was no longer so full of smoke as it had been, for the vapour had poured out in immense quantities through the hole in the ceiling.

But the flames began to show themselves, being increased by the draught.

Blueskin called to those above, and held the insensible girl as high up above his head as he could.

Arms were stretched down to take her, and she was quickly lifted on to the deck.

Blueskin followed.

By this time the flames had got terrible hold of the vessel, and no one now could venture to indulge in the hope that the Saucy Kate would be saved.

The boats were immediately called for by the captain.

It was wonderful to see what discipline was preserved on board his little craft.

As orderly as though the men had been on board a man-of-war the boats were lowered.

The Saucy Kate was fitted with only two.

One of these was of good size, and would hold about fourteen persons closely packed.

The other was only just large enough for three.

Edgworth Bess had been half suffocated with the smoke, and had the relief been only a little more tardy than it was, she would have been quite so.

As it was, the keen wind and the waves splashing over her quickly restored her to her senses.

The next thing to do was to escape from the burning ship.

By Blueskin's desire, and the captain's consent, the large boat was to receive the crew, and the small boat Blueskin, Ned Cantle, and Edgworth Bess.

The captain informed them that they were not far from the coast of Holland, and that by daybreak, if they could only continue to keep afloat till then, they would either be able to make the shore, or else be picked up by some other vessel.

There was now no time to be lost.

The captain and his crew got into the large boat, according to arrangement, and our three friends into the small one.

Both boats then cast off.

The Saucy Kate, now all ablaze from stem to stern, seemed to shoot a head of them with lightning-like rapidity.

She was indeed going at a fearful speed before the gale. The boats, of course, went at a much slower rate.

But they seemed to have escaped one death only to fall victims to another.

In such a storm as that, how was it possible for two such frail boats so heavily loaded to keep afloat.

In an instant, both boats became separated from each other, though it had been their intention to keep together if possible.

But they drifted apart at once.

Far away across the wild desert of water flew the burning ship, casting around it a strange and wonderful radiance.

The large boat, containing the captain and the crew of the Saucy Kate, sank very low down indeed into the water.

It was too heavily laden.

Just as Blueskin made this reflection he perceived in the distance a monstrous wave sweeping towards them.

On it came with the swiftness and stealthiness of a snake.

Blueskin held his breath when he saw it reach the large boat.

How it happened he hardly knew, but in a second the boat and its occupants were engulfed.

The wave had burst immediately above them, and swamped the boat at once.

Not a single trace was left of either.

"That is an awful sight," said Blueskin.

Ned Cantle replied, with a groan:

"It's all over with them—all over with every one! That wave would carry them fathoms down, and would stun them! We shall see them no more!"

Not knowing how soon they might share the fate of their late companions, the three friends sat in the boat in a state of the utmost suspense.

Ned Cantle undertook the navigation of the little vessel, but all he did was to keep her head before the wind.

This was all that could be done.

But the storm was now subsiding rapidly.

This subsidence had been going on for some time, and that huge wave which wrought so much havoc was the last of such size and power.

The surface of the ocean grew calmer each moment, though still it looked vexed and angry.

Ned Cantle had spent much of his life upon the ocean, and he regarded these signs with pleasure.

"Dawn is not far off," he said, "and the tempest is virtually over. The only thing that gives me any anxiety is our situation."

"Where are we?"

"That is just what I want to know. I have no idea whether we are in mid-ocean or whether we are near the coast. We must wait till morning."

Blueskin was occupied almost incessantly in baling the water out of the boat.

Edgworth Bess, looking faint and ill, and ready to die, sat clinging frantically to her seat.

And so the boat flew at a rapid speed over the trackless ocean, while those within it had no idea where they were going; to them all directions seemed alike.

The wind, however, had subsided to a steady though stiff breeze.

The lightning and thunder had ceased, and the huge clouds which had covered the sky like a pall were gradually breaking up and drifting away.

CHAPTER CCCXXV.

AFTER MANY DANGERS, THE FUGITIVES AT LENGTH REACH AMSTERDAM, AND BLUESKIN SETS OUT ON HIS RETURN TO LONDON.

FAR away now in the distance was the Saucy Kate. Her position, however, was clearly marked, for the fire still raged, and the ruddy flames cast their reflection upon the water.

Those friends of ours who have braved so many dangers and escaped so many perils were now alone on the ocean, with nothing to save them from death but a tiny boat, which threatened every moment to sink beneath the waves.

Fate now seemed wholly set against them.

At that moment, Blueskin's presence in London was most urgently required, and there he was in mid-ocean, with only a very uncertain prospect of reaching the land at all.

But under the most favourable circumstances, it appeared quite impossible for him to reach London in time.

As the wind continued to blow steadily in one direction, Ned Cantle let the boat go before it.

Glancing up at the stars, he made out that they were proceeding east by north.

"Our position is not so bad as it might have been," he said, after informing Blueskin in what direction they were going. "If I have not quite lost my reckoning and the boat continues to keep her course, we shall sight the coast of Holland before to-morrow night."

"There is some consolation in knowing that; but since we embarked we have had nothing but disaster. Give me the land!"

"So say I," rejoined Ned Cantle. "I have tried both, and given each a fair trial, but I say—Give me the land!"

Blueskin now turned his attention to Edgworth Bess, and endeavoured to cheer her drooping spirits.

He found his task a difficult one.

The poor girl was thoroughly prostrated, both physically and mentally.

Even what she had gone through while on board the Saucy Kate was quite sufficient to cause this.

And then her mind was full of the utmost dread and apprehension concerning Jack Sheppard.

A voice seemed to ring in her ears, and say:

"You have seen Jack Sheppard for the last time!"

Then she was cold and wet, for the waves broke over the boat continually, and Blueskin was constantly employed in baling the water out.

Wishing for death, then, and wholly deaf to such consolation as Blueskin could offer her, Edgworth Bess sat upon the seat in the little boat.

By that time the Saucy Kate had vanished.

She had either burnt to the water's edge and sunk, or else drifted out of sight.

And so wearily—most wearily passed away those hours of the night which had to elapse before morning came.

At length, with quite a cry of joy, Ned Cantle pointed out a long streak of greyish light, which indicated that dawn was close at hand.

It also pointed out the east, and Ned found that he had not been mistaken in the course of the vessel.

Gradually day broke, and the faint flush of early morn stole over the foam-tipped crests of the surging billows.

At last the sun rose.

With great eagerness both Blueskin and Ned Cante strained their eyes in hope of catching sight of land; but as far as they could see there was nothing but water on every side.

Higher and higher rose the sun.

But still no traces of land could be seen, although an eager look-out was kept for it continually.

The wind lulled.

The little boat urged its way but slowly over the waters.

Ned Cante would not use the oars as he might have done.

He was anxious to husband his strength, in case the time should come when there would be urgent need for it.

All three began now to suffer terribly from three evils.

They were hunger, cold, and thirst.

Not a single vessel was in sight.

There seemed to be no aid for them.

Then the wind ceased, and the sea became almost as smooth as a mill-pond.

The little boat now lay motionless upon the ocean.

There was no resource but to use the oars, and unwillingly enough Ned Cante took them up.

A few long, vigorous sweeps were given, and once more the boat flew rapidly through the water.

There was nothing to steer by now save the sun, and this was soon found to be extremely difficult, for they had no means of ascertaining the correct time.

And so the whole of that day wore away.

It was a long one to our friends, but it was devoid of incident.

Blueskin and Ned Cante took the oars by turns.

At last the sun went down, and they were still on the deep, apparently as far off the land as ever.

They strained their eyes up to the last in the hope of being able to make out the outlines of some friendly shore.

Deeper despair now filled all their hearts, and they felt inclined to give over making any further exertion.

They were dreadfully fatigued by the labour they had already performed.

Still they might be only a short distance from the shore.

With his whole body aching and stiff, Ned Cante still continued to pull the oars.

More hours passed.

Edgworth Bess was so fortunate as to fall into a deep though uneasy slumber.

When the stars came out, Ned satisfied himself that they were rather out of their course, and directed the head of the vessel due east.

Taking it in brief turns they continued to row throughout the night, for there was scarcely any wind.

It may be imagined how that dawn was anxiously waited for.

They felt, indeed, that they could not support another day.

Blueskin chafed with impatience at his unfortunate position until he was almost frantic.

But he could not help himself.

There was a horrible foreboding at his heart concerning Jack Sheppard.

He feared that he was in greater peril now than he had ever been during the whole of his long and adventurous career.

But he little thought what were the real facts of the case, and that Jack was counting the last minutes left to him on earth.

That night seemed as though it would never end.

All things, however, must have a termination, and Blueskin was aroused from a long fit of melancholy meditation by hearing his companion say:

"Morning is at hand!"

Blueskin looked up, and then, straight ahead of the boat, he saw a faint light, which indicated the position of the east.

But when it grew fairly light, the hearts of the three fugitives were gladdened with joy.

On the far-off horizon they could just distinguish a long dark streak, which Ned Cante told them was land.

Now that their destination was within sight, it was

wonderful to see with what renewed strength Ned Cante used the oars.

Sheer fatigue at length compelled him to desist, and then Blueskin took the oars, and rowed as he had never rowed before.

Still the distant land seemed to mock them and recede as they approached.

But this was only their overheated fancy.

The shore when they first caught sight of it was many miles further off than they had thought it was.

It was mid-day before they, fainting and exhausted, reached the land.

Strangely enough, they had arrived at their original destination, namely, Amsterdam.

It was Ned Cante who communicated this joyful intelligence, for, having visited the place before, he was of course easily able to recognise it.

Considerable interest was attracted to their arrival, and when they touched against the pier our friends found that quite a large crowd had collected.

Anxious inquiries were made respecting their condition, to all of which Ned Cante replied briefly and truthfully.

The Saucy Kate was well known at Amsterdam, and so was her captain too.

The greatest regret was manifested for her unfortunate loss.

In their cheerful hospitality, the citizens offered the three fugitives every accommodation, but Ned declined it, and led the way to the beer-house of which he had already spoken, and which was kept by the Widow Graacht.

They had not far to go.

As soon as he entered, Ned pronounced the word "Keizer," as he had directed Blueskin to do.

An immediate change in the manners of the landlady became visible, and she conducted them to the best room in the beer-house, which was but a poor one, as rooms go.

"Thus far all is well!" said Ned Cante.

"Yes," replied Blueskin, "and it is entirely owing to your exertions that such is the case. In your charge I leave this young girl. Treat her carefully, and one day you will reap the advantage of so doing. I cannot stay myself—not even to rest. I must leave for London, but I hope I shall soon return to you!"

"And Jack?" said Edgworth Bess.

"Yes," returned Blueskin, "if it is within my power as a human being, Jack shall return with me! Look!—here are riches. Take them! Ned Cante here, who I am sure you may trust in all things, will convert these trinkets and precious stones into coin. Go with him wherever he may direct, and as soon as it is possible I will rejoin you!"

While speaking these words, Blueskin placed upon the table the valuables with which he had crammed his pockets.

He retained only a small portion for himself.

All the rest he gave to Ned Cante, so that, come what would, he thought Edgworth Bess would be saved from actual want.

Blueskin would not stay for either rest or refreshment.

Both of those, he said, he could obtain on board of the vessel that was to take him back to London.

Repeating his injunctions to Ned Cante to look after the safety of Edgworth Bess, Blueskin bid them both farewell.

"For my sake," she said—"for my sake do all you can! My heart tells me that Jack is in dreadful danger! Hasten to him I beseech, and return with him here to me!"

"I will do so, never fear! I feel confident in my power! I will not fail!"

"You raise my hopes."

"I should be glad to do so. I would fain make you believe that happy days are in store for all of us, and will soon be here."

"I hope so; but as soon as you possibly can you will return here?"

"I will!—Take my word for it!"

"Enough—enough! Farewell! Now that I know you are going I feel much happier than I did!"

"That is good news, then! Until I come back rest yourself as much as you can. It will be no small consolation for you to know that you have nothing to fear from Jonathan Wild!"

The young girl shuddered.

"I never hear his name pronounced," she said, "without feeling a cold chill pass through my veins."

"Be of good heart, he cannot molest you here!"

"Will his villainies never cease?"

"The day cannot be far distant when he will reap a terrible retribution for all his crimes. The sum of his iniquity is almost complete, and the destruction of his house is, I trust, the first step towards his downfall."

"Once more, farewell!"

"Farewell!" said Blueskin. "This is no time for idle conversation. When I get on board, I will endeavour to make up for the fatigue and hardships I have suffered."

With these words, Blueskin left the little beer-house, at the back of the Stadhuis, and directed his steps towards the pier.

Upon arriving here, he learned immediately that a packet would start in less than half an hour.

This was the very thing; and, overjoyed by the prospect of soon seeing London again, Blueskin paid his passage-money and went on board.

Day was fast closing in; but the sky was clear, and there seemed every prospect of a quick and favourable voyage.

CHAPTER CCCCXXVI.

NED CANTLE CONVERTS SOME OF WILD'S PROPERTY INTO GOLD, AND CONDUCTS EDGORTH BESS TO A PLACE OF TEMPORARY SAFETY.

It was wonderful to see the change that took place in Edgorth Bess's manner and appearance after the departure of Blueskin.

Hope had once more gained the ascendancy in her fair young breast.

Her spirits were raised by the prospect that in a short time Jack Sheppard would return, and for evermore be free from the machinations of Jonathan Wild, the villainous thief-taker.

Fortunately, there was no one at hand to whisper in her ear the distressing intelligence that at that very moment, while she was felicitating herself upon his return, Jack Sheppard was seriously wounded and a helpless prisoner in Newgate.

What would have been her despair if she had known that his foes, finding that strong rooms and fetters were powerless to keep him, had given up such means of securing their prisoner, and that, instead, Jonathan Wild sat constantly in the cell along with him, making his escape a matter of utter impossibility.

Well, indeed, was it for her that she was spared such a terrible knowledge.

As it was, she partook of the refreshments which were laid before her with considerable relish, and then laid down to sleep.

Ned Cantle was as thoroughly wore out as herself, and therefore he gladly followed her example.

Neither woke until late the next morning.

Upon descending they partook of breakfast, and then Ned said:

"If you please, miss, we must think about moving!"

"Are we not safe here!"

"Well—yes."

"Then why move?"

"If you must know, miss, this is the reason. You can't tell, no more can I, whether Jonathan Wild did not know we were on board the Saucy Kate."

"Shall I never be free from that man's persecutions?"

"I hope so, miss, but just you listen to me for a minute or two."

"Willingly, for you are the only friend left to protect me now."

"Cheer up, miss! Don't be down-hearted! It's a long lane that hasn't no turning, you know!"

"What were you about to tell me?"

"Just this here. I have heard say, and I do believe it's true, mind you, that Jonathan Wild has agents all over the wide world."

"I know his power is great, but I should doubt that!"

"Well, I don't know for all over the world, miss, but I am pretty nearly certain he has got agents in this here city of Amsterdam. Now, he might cause inquiries to be

made, and then it will be recollected that we came on shore in a boat from the Saucy Kate——"

"I see—I see," said Edgorth Bess, interrupting him; "we are not safe here."

"I don't altogether think we are, and therefore I think the best thing we can do will be to make a move to some other place."

"But Blueskin—how will he find us?"

"Oh, don't you trouble yourself about that, miss; I have arranged that along of him."

"Then I have nothing more to say."

"To-day is Sunday," remarked Ned Cantle, "and everybody will be abroad, so that among so many our departure will not be noticed. I know a safe, quiet place where we can go to, and remain until Blueskin returns."

"Let us go, then!"

"In a minute. First of all I must turn some of this swag into cash!"

"But it is Sunday!"

"I know that, but I shall pay a visit to a certain Jew that I am acquainted with, and Jews, you know, keep their Sunday on Saturday."

"Well, go, and return as quickly as you can."

"Depend upon me, miss."

Ned Cantle took away half the valuables which had been left in his charge, and having stowed them carefully away, set forth upon his errand.

He had not far to go.

He found the Israelite at home.

It was a common thing in the last century for people to leave England with stolen goods and come to Amsterdam.

Here they were easily disposed of.

Ned Cantle, however, in years past had had dealings with this Jew.

Instant admission was given him.

Although several years had elapsed since they had last met, the Jew recognised Ned instantly.

His eyes sparkled when he beheld the wealth that was poured out upon the table.

Had it not been for their previous acquaintanceship, Ned would not have got such a good price as he did; but he happened to know how to deal with the old man.

When, therefore, the Jew having carefully taken stock of the whole, said:

"My frent, I vill gif you von tousant thalers (150*l.*) for the lot."

Ned Cantle made no reply, but commenced sweeping the valuables into a heap, preparatory to putting them into his pocket.

"Shtop—shtop!" cried the Jew, when he saw what his customer was about.

Ned paused.

"Ish not von tousant thalers enough?"

"No."

The Jew sighed.

"Trade ish bad."

"Get out, you old vampire! Now, then, how much will you give? Make haste, or I shall be off. There are plenty of others the same trade as yourself in Amsterdam."

"By Moses and Aaron you are right! Competishun is ruining me!"

The old Jew shook his head lugubriously.

Ned began to gather up the precious stones again.

"Shtop—shtop!"

"I can't stop here all day."

"Shtop—shtop, I shay!"

"How much will you give?"

"Von tousant two huntret thalers."

"Is that all?"

"All, shay you?"

"Yes."

"Shtelp me Abraham, if I give you twelve huntret thalers I shall loshe by you!"

"Bah!—stuff!"

"Only I don't like to loshe an old cushtomer!"

Ned Cantle said no more, but continued to gather the valuables up into a heap.

The old Jew watched him with ravenous eyes.

But he did not speak.

At least, not until Ned was about to put the first handful in his pocket.

Then he cried:

"Shtop—shtop!"

"I sha'n't!" said Ned; "you made a fool of me before." He dropped the handful into his pocket.

"Oh, Moses! I will make it thirteen huntret thalers!"

Ned Cantle shook his head.

"The very lowest sum I shall take is fifteen hundred thalers!" he said. "You have two chances to my one; you can either give it or let it alone!"

"I shall be ruht!"

"That's your look-out! Good-bye! I'm off!"

The Jew actually let Ned Cantle get as far as the door. Then he cried out again:

"Shtop—shtop!"

"Will you give the fifteen hundred?"

"Sh'elp me Esdras——"

"Will you give it?"

"It's too mush!"

"I'm off, then, to find some one else!"

"Come back!" screamed the old Jew, just as Ned crossed the threshold. "You shall have fifteen huntret!"

He said these words with a heavy sigh.

"Why, you old villain, you will make a thousand thalers by the transaction!"

"Oh, monshtrous! I shall loshe!"

"Bah! Now then, down with the cash! If you hesitate, or try to bate me, I shall ask sixteen hundred at once, and not let you have them for less!"

"Oh, Abraham! sixteen huntret!"

"Now then, what do you say?"

"Here you are!"

The Jew began to count out the money.

In the meantime, Blueskin emptied his pockets, and placed the glittering heap upon the table again.

The Jew made several indirect attempts to induce Ned Cantle to take less, but his customer firmly resisted every time.

Shortly afterwards, Ned left the Jew's and went to the beerhouse with the cash in his pocket, representing the very respectable sum of two hundred and twenty-five pounds.

This would suffice to last them for some time to come, and then there was the other half of the valuables still remaining, so that altogether the total amount of the booty carried off from Wild's house by Blueskin represented a very large sum indeed.

Edgworth Bess was anxiously awaiting the arrival of her new-found friend, for she fancied, after what he had told her, that she was in a very insecure place.

"All right, miss!" said Ned, respectfully—"I'll just settle up with the widow, and then we will be off."

"The sooner the better!"

"So say I, miss. I shall be back in a minute."

Ned Cantle at once repaired to the widow Graacht, to whom he paid the reckoning, and, at the same time, informed her of the watchword Blueskin would make use of when he came, and where his (Cantle's) destination now was.

All this being satisfactorily arranged, he returned to the room in which he had left Edgworth Bess waiting.

In another moment, they emerged into the street.

As Ned had told her, it was Sunday, and in spite of her sad thoughts Edgworth Bess could not help looking at the strange scenes around her with feelings of pleasure.

The quaint old city had a holiday appearance.

The canals were crowded with boats.

"You see, miss," said Ned, "nearly everybody here goes everywhere by water. It's easier than walking, I know; but we might be noticed if we took a boat, and so I think, although it is not the most pleasant, that we will walk."

"Yes—yes! Let us walk by all means."

"I thought you would say so when I explained all to you."

"Our object must be to elude observation as much as possible."

"Exactly, miss. We've got a longish way to travel; but still I can take you to a place of safety."

"Never mind the distance," said the poor girl, cheerfully, though she was so weak as to be scarcely able to walk.

But the intolerable dread she had of again falling into the hands of Jonathan Wild endowed her with factitious strength, and enabled her to triumph over the debility

which her illness, confinement, and excitement of mind had produced.

In a little while she was compelled to support herself by taking hold of Ned's arm.

The bravo fellow cheered her up in his rude way as well as he was able, and endeavoured to take a bright view of the future.

The city of Amsterdam was left behind, but still there seemed to be no signs of the termination of the journey, and so Edgworth Bess had to sit down upon a stone by the roadside and rest herself.

After a while she resumed her journey.

At length, Ned pointed out to her a wood of great extent at a considerable distance in advance.

"That is our destination," he said.

"That wood?"

"Yes. On the borders of it there is a cottage, the occupants of which are well known to me. It is the most retired spot round Amsterdam. Have you not noticed what a long time it is since we saw anybody?"

"Yes—yes! It is a gloomy place."

"It is. You are right there, but you must remember that it is safe."

"That overbalances all other considerations."

Weary and faint almost unto death, Edgworth Bess and her companion at last halted before a cottage which, as Ned Cantle had stated, was built upon the outskirts of the gigantic wood.

CHAPTER CCCCXXVII.

BLUESKIN ARRIVES IN LONDON AT SEVEN O'CLOCK ON THE MORNING OF THE DAY FIXED FOR THE EXECUTION OF JACK SHEPPARD.

BLUESKIN was thoroughly worn out.

He had just strength enough left to pay his passage-money and get on board the London packet, and that was all.

Upon reaching the deck, he sank down at once into a swoon.

There was a medical man on board, and he at once guessed the cause of Blueskin's illness.

He was recovered from his swoon, then cordials in small quantities were administered.

After that, light food was given, and then Blueskin fell into a sound sleep, which lasted many hours.

In the meanwhile, the packet flew over the waters at a rapid speed.

The wind was fair, and the weather charming, and all looked forward to a rapid passage.

The medical man who had attended upon Blueskin, prophesied that when he awoke he would be quite well.

He was right.

After sleeping for nearly eight hours, Blueskin opened his eyes.

A disagreeable sensation of weakness was the only thing that ailed him, and this was nothing more than might be reasonably expected.

A light meal, however, had the effect of putting that right to a very great extent.

At last the events which had recently occurred seemed to be obliterated from Blueskin's mind.

By degrees he recollected all, and then he became feverishly impatient.

The packet was cleaving the waters with unusual swiftness, but our friend thought the progress made was intolerably slow.

And so, chafing and fretting, wondering in what condition he should find affairs as regarded Jack Sheppard when he returned to London, and perpetually inquiring how much further they had to go, and how much longer they would be, the homeward journey was performed.

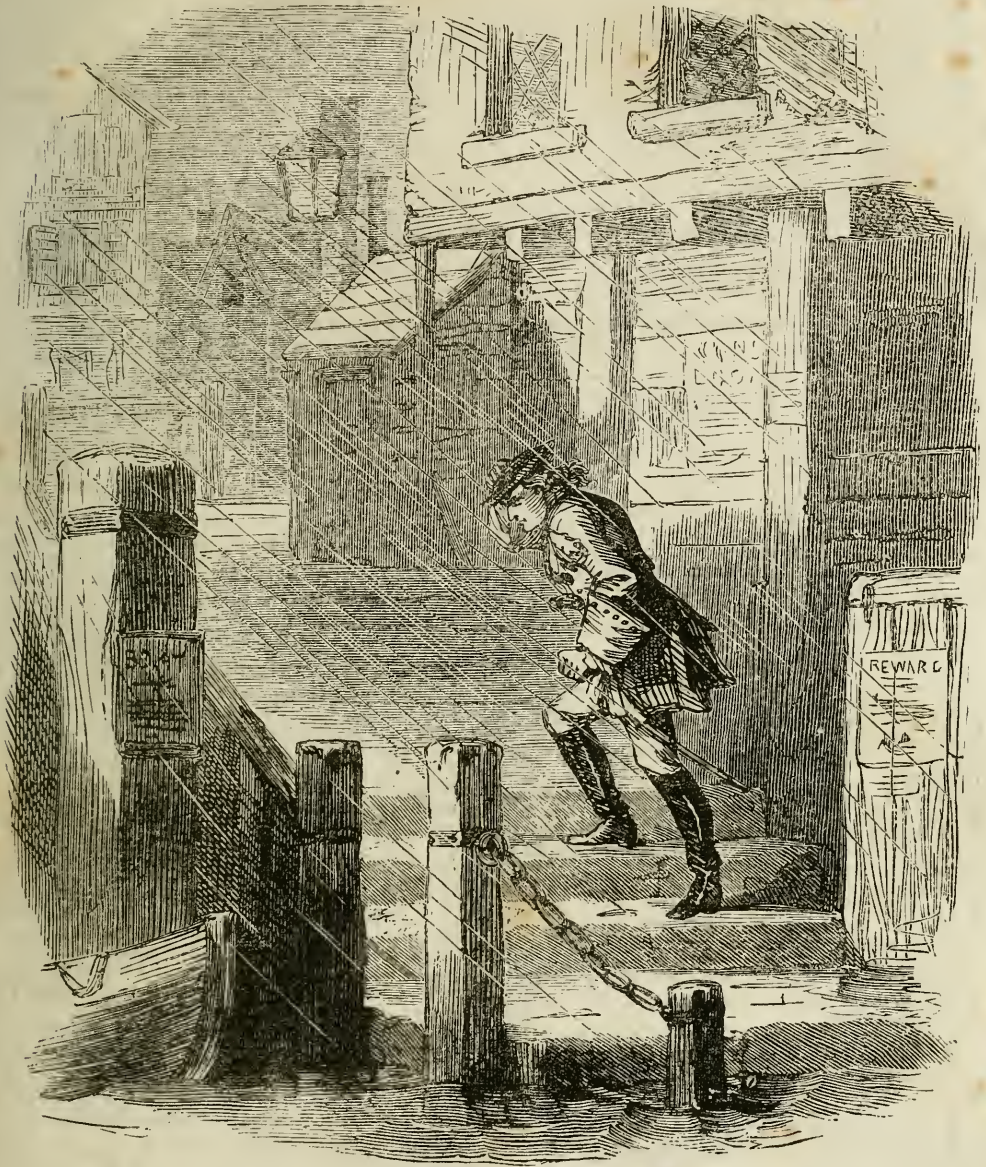
From the captain Blueskin learned that if the weather continued fair, and all circumstances were as favourable as possible, the earliest time by which he could hope to reach London would be late on Sunday night.

Late on Sunday night! and Monday morning was fixed for the execution of Jack Sheppard.

But Blueskin did not know this.

In all his anticipations concerning the worst that had happened he never imagined that.

Blueskin counted every minute with an impatience which can scarcely be imagined.



BLUESKIN ARRIVES IN LONDON ON THE MORNING APPOINTED FOR JACK SHEPPARD'S EXECUTION.

Every hour seemed as long as a whole day.

At length Sunday evening came.

Blueskin strained his eyes in the hope of catching sight of the land before the darkness of the fast-approaching night hid all things from his view.

But he was disappointed.

Darkness came, but in the far distance he could see nothing but the faint line dividing the ocean from the horizon.

Still he sat and waited.

It was close upon midnight when Blueskin heard some one approaching the spot where he stood.

He turned round.

It was the captain of the packet.

"Well, mynheer," he said, addressing our friend; "your anxiety will soon be over."

No. 89.—BLUESKIN.

"Are we so near the end of this tedious voyage?"

"Tedious do you call it? It is the quickest I have ever made, and I have traded between these two ports for nearly thirty years."

"Well, well—how much longer shall we be? You would not wonder at my impatience if you knew the reason why I wished to reach the shore."

"All right, mynheer. That is your business; not mine."

"How much longer shall we be? Where are we?"

"Look!" said the captain, raising his arm, and pointing across the water. "Do you see that twinkling light there, that looks very much like a star?"

Blueskin shaded his eyes, and looked earnestly in the direction in which the captain pointed.

"Yes—yes! I see it!" he said.

"Do you know what it is?"

"No."

"Well, that is the Nore light."

"We are close to the mouth of the Thames, then?"

"Yes."

"How long will it take you to reach London?"

"Well, it so happens that we have both wind and tide in our favour. I should think we shall do it in six hours."

"That will be at about six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Yes; or rather this morning, for it is past midnight."

The captain strolled aft again, and Blueskin fixed his eyes upon the beacon-light which had been pointed out to him.

He watched the gradual brightening of the light as they drew closer and closer to it, with unalloyed satisfaction.

At length the lighthouse was passed, and then they were fairly in the Thames.

As the captain had truly said, they had both wind and tide in their favour; and now that he could catch sight of the banks on either side of him, and see them flit past, he fancied their speed was more accelerated than it had been.

Without the occurrence of any particular incident, the vessel worked its way up the Thames.

At last, through the darkness, Blueskin could gradually distinguish objects with which he was familiar.

The captain had guessed the time when the end of his voyage would be reached to a nicety.

When they were near St. Katherine's Docks, Blueskin signified his wish to be rowed ashore in a boat.

To this the captain made no objection, provided the extra money for the accommodation was paid.

This was no obstacle.

Blueskin's motive for wishing to be put ashore may be guessed.

He knew the passengers upon landing would be subjected to a certain amount of scrutiny, and this it was highly important he should avoid.

Upon reaching the land, Blueskin paused for a moment, reflectively.

Would it be best to go over land or take a boat to London Bridge?

He decided upon the latter course as being the best.

He had not far to go before he found a wherry with a waterman asleep in it.

He woke him up, and the waterman unshipped his oars and pushed off with manifest willingness.

The distance to London Bridge was not very great, and, as the tide was rising, the waterman soon performed the journey.

Giving him a liberal fare, Blueskin sprang out of the boat on to the slippery stone steps leading from the water to the street above.

A sharp rain had begun to fall, and the wind beat it full into our friend's face as he ascended.

Heedless of the weather, however, he hastened up the steps.

Upon gaining the bridge, he paused.

It was quite dark.

He could hear a clock chiming, and listened to hear the hour.

The clock struck seven.

"So late!" he said. "Now, where shall I go to learn any information about Jack?"

It was no trifling thing for Blueskin to make his way about the streets of London.

No doubt there was an active hue and cry after him.

For his own personal danger he cared not; all he was intent upon was to discover what had happened to Jack Sheppard.

He was at a loss to know which would be the best place to go for the purpose.

Presently, however, Blueskin bethought himself of a small public-house in the vicinity of Newgate Market, to which while he was with Jonathan Wild he was a frequent visitor.

The landlord he believed he could fully trust, and have no fears of being betrayed by him.

Here, so close to Newgate as it was, he would surely be able to learn all particulars.

At this moment a hackney-coach went lumbering by,

and, believing that he should secure his safety by so doing, Blueskin hailed it, and ordered the jarvey to drive him to Smithfield.

As they approached this locality, Blueskin noticed an unusual concourse of people, who apparently were all hurrying to one point.

For a moment he forgot that it was Monday morning, but as soon as he recollected this he leaned back again, for he knew executions always took place on a Monday, and no week ever went by without some victim being sent to Tyburn Tree.

And here, perhaps, it will be as well for us to caution the reader against falling into an error, as he easily might do.

At the beginning of the last century, executions took place upon quite a different plan to what they do at the present time.

Now, a scaffold is erected in the Old Bailey, outside the gloomy old prison of Newgate.

The condemned culprit is led from his cell through various passages, and up a flight of steps, and then through a door which opens direct upon the scaffold.

But then it was quite different.

For many years past the hour chosen for the execution has been eight o'clock in the morning.

But it used to be twelve, or thereabouts.

The executions did not take place in front of Newgate, but in a lovely country spot out of London, called Tyburn.

It was ten o'clock when the procession started from Newgate, and it was generally mid-day before the ceremony was over.

We have thought fit to make this explanation in order to prevent the reader from falling into an error.

The people Blueskin saw were not waiting for the execution, but to see the procession issue forth from the court-yard.

It never struck our friend that they were waiting to see Jack Sheppard led forth.

Blueskin got down on the opposite side of Smithfield Market, to that upon which the public-house was situated to which he intended to pay a visit.

He approached it circuitously, and noticed with great annoyance that many people were hovering about.

But it was not yet fairly light, so pulling his hat down over his brows, and bending his head, Blueskin entered.

He stepped into a little room, upon the door of which "Private" was printed.

He heard some one call out to him to stop, and to come back; but unheeding, he walked on into the room into which customers were never allowed to penetrate, it being used by the landlord and his family alone.

Scarcely had he entered than a waiter followed.

"Here, sir," he said; "this way, if you please. You must not stop here. 'Tis his a private room!"

Blueskin said nothing, but put half-a-crown into the waiter's hand.

"Go and tell the landlord that an old and particular friend wants to speak to him immediately!"

The waiter retired.

"Directly afterwards the landlord appeared.

Blueskin closed the door carefully.

"Hush!" he said. "Not a word. My life is in danger! You know me?"

He lifted his hat as he spoke, to afford the landlord a good view of his countenance.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed; "it's Blue——"

"Hush! You must not breathe my name!"

"All right! Sit down! I'll lock the door!"

The landlord did so.

"And now what's the matter?" he asked

"I will tell you. I want to learn all the particulars I can about Jack Sheppard."

The landlord opened his mouth to a preternatural extent, and looked aghast.

Blueskin continued to speak in a rapid whisper.

"I was forced to fly to secure my own safety. I left him wounded on the banks of the Thames."

"Then—then——" gasped the landlord.

"What!"

"Is it possible that you don't know that——"

"What—what? Speak at once—plainly! I have been to Amsterdam, whither I was carried contrary to my in-

elination, and I have not been in London an hour, so I know nothing!"

"Oh, goodness!"

"Tell me—tell me at once what has happened? I cannot bear this suspense."

"I will tell you," said the landlord, licking his lips—"I will tell you! Oh lor! To think you did not know it. But I thought it was strange—"

"Will you tell me what became of Jack Sheppard?"

"Yes, I will."

"I mean after I left him on the banks of the Thames."

"Yes—yes! I know! Jonathan Wild!"

"Ha!"

"Jonathan Wild and the men he had with him carried Jack Sheppard, who looked more like a corpse than a living being—"

"Where—where? Carried him where?"

"To Newgate!"

CHAPTER CCCCXXVIII.

BLUESKIN ALTOGETHER DESPAIRS OF SAVING JACK SHEPPARD FROM TYBURN TREE.

BLUESKIN groaned, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"But Jack was not killed?"

"Oh, no, only wounded, and not very badly. It was loss of blood chiefly, after suffering unusual fatigue."

"Yes, yes! Go on! I breathe again now!"

"Oh, do you? Well, the worst has got to come."

"The worst! Go on with your story, then, and relieve me from this state of suspense."

"Calm yourself, and prepare to listen quietly to what I am going to tell you."

"For heaven's sake, go on!"

"I am! Well, he was taken to Newgate quite helpless and insensible, and placed in one of the strong rooms."

"Not a cell?"

"No, I believe not."

"Then he has escaped?"

"Has he? When? I did not hear of it."

"You mock me! I meant, has he escaped?"

"Ah, no! There's no fear of that!"

"How so? He has broken out before!"

"True; but they never took such care of him before as they have done this time."

"How have they managed it?"

"Jonathan Wild did it all."

"All what?"

"Why, he would not have any fetters put upon Jack Sheppard; he said that was only waste of time and trouble."

"What means has he taken, then, to keep him secure?" asked Blueskin, with increased uneasiness and anxiety.

"Why, it's very clever! Jonathan had a chair and a table carried into the strong room, and there he has stayed ever since, watching Jack's every movement!"

Blueskin started to his feet.

"Sit down!" said the landlord—"sit down, and I will tell you the rest."

Mechanically, Blueskin obeyed.

"Well, ever since Jack Sheppard has been in the strong room, Jonathan has sat there. He has not left him even for a moment. So you will see that it was totally impossible for Jack Sheppard, with all his cleverness, to make another escape!"

"What is to be done?"

"Hush! Be calm! I haven't told you all yet."

"What more is there?"

"Why, it's wonderful to me to think why you came here! But you could not have gained such full information from anybody else in London as you could from me."

"How comes it that you know so much?"

"Why, one of the turnkeys, as is some kin to my wife, comes here reg'lar, and he told me all."

"All what?"

"Why, when he—that is, Jonathan Wild, you know—had got Jack safe in the cell, he called for the Governor, and for pen and ink, and then he dictated a letter—for Jonathan's so knocked about he can't do much—"

Blueskin smiled grimly.

"The letter was addressed to the Secretary of State."

"Yes, it was. How did you know that?"

"I guessed it."

"Well, the letter was, as you say, directed to the Secretary of State, and it contained the information that Jack Sheppard was again a prisoner in Newgate, that Jonathan Wild was watching over him, and prayed that a warrant might be sent with all speed, in order that he might be executed."

"And when was that letter sent?"

"On Friday."

"And the reply?"

"The Secretary made no reply, but he returned the warrant by the messenger!"

"Good heavens! why did you not tell me this at once?"

"I have been telling you as fast as I could."

"Why, to-day is Munday!"

"No doubt about that."

"And what day was appointed for the execution?"

"Monday!"

"What, to-day!"

"Yes!"

Blueskin groaned bitterly.

"If I had known," he said; "if I had known! But fate was against me!"

"Didn't you notice a lot of people about on your way hither!"

"I did."

"They are waiting to see Jack Sheppard start!"

"He is lost!"

"There is no hope of saving him, I fear!"

"None—none! Why, it is the eleventh hour! There is not time to do anything!"

"There is not! And such precautions have been taken as have never been taken before!"

"What are they?"

"A new gallows has been erected at Tyburn, where the other one formerly stood; and here at twelve o'clock last night a regiment of soldiers took up their position!"

"A regiment of soldiers?"

"Yes, and all well armed! They have formed a circle round the gallows, and will not allow anyone to approach within a certain distance; and—would you believe it!—although it was twelve hours before the time appointed for the execution, an immense crowd of people had gathered there, and the soldiers had a great deal of trouble in taking up their position even then!"

Blueskin paid but little attention to this last speech of the landlord.

His thoughts were busy.

He was trying to think of some means by which Jack could be saved.

But he was baffled.

It seemed impossible.

As impossible as it would be for him to turn day into night.

The disappointments and failures they had lately had, would make the authorities more than ever determined to carry their point, and not be defeated this time.

Every precaution would be taken to insure their object.

How, then, could Blueskin, single handed, hearing the distressful intelligence at the last moment—too late to put into execution any elaborate plan of action—with a price set upon his own head—with the minions of the law upon his track—how was he to hope to turn aside the current of events, and save Jack Sheppard from the awful fate impending over him.

It seemed the extremity of folly to entertain such a thought.

But Blueskin felt that in the face of all this he could not sit quietly down and allow his old comrade to be led forth to death without making at least an effort to save him.

Even if the attempt were ever so impotent, still it should be made.

"What is the time now?" he said, suddenly.

"A quarter past eight."

"What time will the procession start?"

"At ten."

"Then I have an hour and three-quarters before me."

"Just so."

"What can be done in that time?"

"Nothing—at least, nothing towards saving Jack! Blueskin, my friend, you must give up that idea."

"Never—never!"

"But you must! What can you hope to do?"

Blueskin was silent.

"Why," continued the landlord, "even if you had got the whole of the mob on your side that will assemble round Tyburn Tree to-day, they would not be a match for the well-armed, disciplined soldiers, acting under the command of clear-headed officers!"

There was a good deal of sense and truth in what the landlord said, and Blueskin could not avoid admitting it to himself.

"And then," he continued, "I know for certain that the cart itself will be carefully guarded by another band of soldiers, and so you see that, even if you had made every arrangement, which you have not, you would not stand the least chance of effecting a rescue!"

Blueskin covered his face with his hands, and groaned again.

He was beginning to realize more vividly how powerless he was to help his comrade.

He must die!

There seemed to be no help for it.

"Then," continued the landlord, "it is quite out of the question to think Jack Sheppard will be able to do anything himself towards achieving his freedom. Half a hundred eyes at least will be fixed upon him—his every movement will be watched—he will be tightly bound and placed in the cart, from which he could no more escape than you could fly over Smithfield Market!"

Every word the landlord uttered carried conviction with it.

Each one seemed to strike Blueskin a blow upon his heart.

Then the clock that stood in a corner of the room near the door chimed the half-hour.

Blueskin started up at the sound.

"Another quarter of an hour gone!"

"Yes, it is half-past eight now."

Only another hour and a-half remain, and I am idling here doing nothing!"

"There is nothing you can do! It is useless to think of it!"

"But I will do something!"

"What?"

Blueskin sank down again as this pointed question was asked him.

"It is true!" continued the landlord, "you might rush out into the street in an excited state, and so obtain your own capture; but that would do Jack no good, and certainly you none!"

"Can't you propose something?" said Blueskin, after a pause.

"No, I cannot!" was the reply—"I cannot see the faintest ghost of a chance for success, let you try what you will!"

"But I must!"

"Try! For instance, now they are placing the breakfast in the cell—the last breakfast he will eat—then he will be pinioned, and then led to the cart. During the whole of that time he will be, as you know well enough, completely surrounded by officials of some sort or other—he won't be left alone for an instant! Isn't that true?"

"Quite true!"

"Very well, then. What chance has Jack himself got either inside the prison or out?"

"None—none!" moaned Blueskin, dejectedly.

"And what chance have you outside, or anyone else?"

"Then there is no hope?"

"None whatever!"

The clock struck a quarter to nine.

"But I cannot leave him to perish thus!" said Blueskin, starting to his feet. "Surely, that clock is wrong! Another quarter of an hour hasn't gone?"

"Yes there has, though; and, what is more, this clock is nearly ten minutes slow, according to St. Sepulchre's!" Blueskin felt as if he was going mad.

Let him turn his eyes in whatever direction he would, he could not see the faintest hope.

It seemed as though fortune had deserted them.

Jack was to perish.

The reader can imagine what kind of effect this conviction would have upon Blueskin.

How he reproached himself for allowing Ned Cattle to push off from the shore, leaving Jack in the hands of his foes.

The information he had received was indisputably correct.

In vain he racked his brain to think of some means which even afforded him the slightest chance of success.

There was none.

Jack could not help himself.

Blueskin could not help him.

Was, then, Jonathan Wild, the villainous thief-taker, to accomplish that object upon which he had so set his heart, and so often sworn to perform, in spite of every obstacle?

It looked like it.

And yet, Blueskin thought, it could not be.

He was aroused from the stupor of despair into which he had fallen by hearing the clock strike nine.

"One more hour!"

"Less," said the landlord.

"Have you not been able to think of anything?"

The landlord shook his head slowly.

"I have thought of something——"

"Let me hear it, then, at once!"

"But you will say that it is preposterous!"

"No—no!"

"That it offers no chance of success—that I must be mad to propose such a thing."

"No—no! Let me hear you. I am like a drowning man—ready to catch at any straw!"

"Listen, then, and I will tell you what I thought."

St. Sepulchre's clock chimed a quarter past nine.

CHAPTER CCCXXIX.

RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH JACK SHEPPARD SPENT SATURDAY IN NEWGATE.

LEAVING the landlord of the inn in Smithfield to communicate his plan to Blueskin, we will return to Jack Sheppard in Newgate.

His frightfully perilous condition should, in good truth, command our earnest and full attention.

As Mr. Snoxall had prophesied, Jack Sheppard, when he awoke from that sound sleep, did not feel like the same man.

Those corporeal faculties of which he had been deprived returned to him, though, of course, only in a faint degree.

Still, he was able to move and speak.

Jonathan Wild took good care that Jack should be supplied with the most nutritious articles of food.

It would have been a bitter disappointment, truly, if his prisoner was not strong enough to be led out to execution on Monday morning.

Jack devoured everything greedily, for he believed that when he was in full possession of his bodily powers, he might see some chance to escape, though at present he could not.

After his first meal he felt very different indeed.

He raised himself up on the bed, and glared fiercely at his foe.

The bullet from Wild's pistol had, in reality, only made a furrow in his flesh, little more than skin deep.

It was the quantity of blood which had poured from the wound that had so thoroughly prostrated him.

So great an effect would not have been produced by it, had he not been so thoroughly exhausted as he was.

But all the exciting occurrences which had taken place on that most eventful night had worn him out.

And so it happened that he was reduced to the condition we have described.

With receiving careful treatment, however, there was no doubt his recovery would be proportionably rapid.

Jonathan Wild saw that his victim's gaze was bent upon him, and he quailed before it.

It was only for a moment, though.

To recover himself, he poured out another glass of brandy from the stone bottle.

"Villain!" said Jack.

The thief-taker took no notice.

"Villain!" said Jack again, in a tone of voice that made Jonathan feel very uncomfortable—"double-dyed villain, even now I defy you!"

"Ha, ha!"

It was a miserable apology for a laugh that issued from Wild.

"You may seek to conceal your confusion by that affectation of mirth, but I can penetrate it! You may think you have at last succeeded in compassing my destruction, but you have not!"

"I have!"

"No you have not, Jonathan Wild! Even at the last moment you will fail, and I tell you so! You may think you have me secure—that I am beyond all human aid, but I tell you you will fail!"

"We shall see on Monday morning!"

"So we shall! You may think at last that you have succeeded in entirely getting the game into your own hands!"

"So I have, Jack!"

"No! although I am here in this strong room, enfeebled by illness and watched over by you!"

"Ha, ha! I am a good nurse, am I not!"

"You mock me, villain, but you shall hear me. notwithstanding!"

"Oh, go on, pray! I am content! Do you know, I rather enjoy a little conversation! I have grown very weary, sitting here so long without anyone to speak to!"

Jack Sheppard affected not to hear this speech, though his gleaming eyes showed how Wild's manner enraged him.

He went on as though he had not been interrupted.

"I say, now that I am here, and now that you have also got in your safe keeping Blueskin and—and Edgworth Bess—"

Jack's voice faltered a little when he pronounced this last name.

Jonathan glared at him in astonishment.

"Eh?" he said.

"Now that you have all three of us prisoners——"

"But I haven't!"

"What?"

"I haven't!"

"Not got Blueskin and Edgworth Bess prisoners as well as myself?"

"Certainly not."

Jack uttered a shout.

"What put that into your head?"

"I thought you had."

"I wish to goodness your thoughts were right. I would give a thousand pounds!"

Jack Sheppard was much surprised by the revelation which had come thus unexpectedly upon him.

He had got the idea firmly fixed in his mind that Blueskin and Edgworth Bess were in close confinement like himself.

He was silent for a moment.

During that brief period of time Wild's thoughts were busy, and he saw a means by which he fancied he could inflict an additional pang upon Jack.

"Well, he said, I never heard the like! Why, you must have forgotten all that happened!"

Jack passed his hand confusedly over his brow, as though he would by that means clear his mental faculties.

"You must have forgotten all!" continued Jonathan.

"When I winged you you were pushing the boat off, were you not?"

"I was."

"Can't you remember what happened after that?"

"No; from the moment of pushing the boat until I woke up and found myself here I remember nothing."

"Oh! ah! I will tell you if you like!"

Jack was silent, and Jonathan was only too glad to interpret that silence as meaning consent.

"Ha! but, Jack, they served you a scurvy trick—a very scurvy trick indeed!"

Jack looked him steadily in the face, as though to ascertain whether the thief-taker was speaking the truth.

"Pretty friends they must be, Jack! You will hardly believe me when I tell you, but it's a fact, nevertheless. When you fell down—shot—half in the water and half out of it—they did not try to lift you into the boat, as they easily might have done, but pushed off without you, abandoning you to your fate, and leaving you to do the best for yourself that you could."

"Liar!" said Jack, fiercely.

"It's the truth!"

"It's a lie!"

"Very well, have your own way; but I would just ask you a question."

Jack disdained to say any more.

Jonathan went on placidly.

"The question is this! If your friends had not deserted you in the moment of danger, in the manner I have described, how comes it that you are a prisoner and they are free?"

This was an unanswerable question, and Jack sank down on the bed quite overwhelmed.

This was what he had never expected—never dreamt of.

He could scarcely believe it, and yet he fancied that, for once in a way, Jonathan spoke the truth.

How Wild chuckled when he saw the effect which his words had produced.

He knew full well that that would touch Jack more deeply than anything else.

It seemed strange, Jack thought to himself, that Blueskin should have abandoned him. He could not account for such a thing.

And Edgworth Bess, too.

His brain whirled.

He uttered a groan, and sank still lower on the bed.

Had he not been aware that his mortal enemy was watching his every movement, and rejoicing over every symptom of agony, he would have writhed with anguish, and shrieked aloud.

This was the bitterest draught he had to swallow! To think, after all that he had done, he should be abandoned in the manner he evidently had been.

In a state of mind that fairly baffles all description, Jack remained for some time.

How long he knew not.

Even Jonathan Wild did not know how much he suffered in the time.

At length Jack began to think more calmly; and then the first thing he did was to blame himself for having so soon allowed himself to be influenced by the manner in which Wild had related what had happened.

To a certain extent the facts might be true; but then they were probably distorted, and purposely so in order to cause him to endure as much mental anguish as he could.

Then his former faith in Blueskin returned, and he felt sure that if he had been left there was no hope for it, and that he would strain every nerve to help him.

He grew calmer and calmer, but he made a resolution to hold no further conversation with Jonathan Wild.

And so he laid upon the bed quite still.

Wild fancied he was torturing himself with the thoughts of being deserted, and so he flung out an occasional taunt.

To these Jack listened with the utmost indifference.

In this manner, then, the day wore away, without the occurrence of any particular incident.

The Governor came in once or twice, and so did Mr. Snoxall.

But that was all.

Nothing was said by either of these parties sufficiently important to deserve to be placed before the reader.

And so Saturday night came, and all hopes of Jack being able to make an escape seemed further off than ever.

Jonathan Wild did not seem to be at all tired of his job.

He sat at the table watching as earnestly as he did the very first hour.

Beside this one great purpose, all other things shrank into comparative insignificance.

He had not been out of the cell for a moment even to visit his son, who was lying dangerously hurt in that portion of the prison set aside for the Governor's private use.

He had never been to visit the ruins of his house.

This was the more extraordinary because, as the reader knows very well, there were certain things in connection with his abode which were undreamt of by the authorities, and the discovery of which would have the effect of putting Wild in a very awkward position indeed.

Not having taken one glance at the blazing ruins, he could not tell what secret recesses were disclosed.

The Governor of Newgate, however, here stood his friend.

He went in person, at Jonathan's request, to make an examination, and he returned with a tolerably favourable report.

The roof had fallen in, carrying all the floors with it.

The walls back and front were standing.

The piece of ground upon which the house had stood was deeply buried in the *debris* of the fire, which was smouldering so late as Saturday night.

The Governor had caused the doors and windows to be boarded over, so as to keep out intruders.

He had also sent to Bow Street, to the inspector there, and caused some police officers to be posted both at the back and the front, so as to keep everybody off.

This was all the more necessary, since there were many people in London—for instance, the whole of the thief-taker's gang—who were fully impressed with the notion that gold and jewels to a very large amount were concealed in the house.

Nothing would have pleased them better than to take advantage of Wild's voluntary imprisonment in Newgate to have gone and poked the rubbish over, in the hope of finding something that would well repay them for the trouble of searching.

But the police officers, being continually on the alert, effectually prevented anything of the sort being done, and Jonathan's myrmidons were forced to keep aloof from a spoil which they considered peculiarly their own.

Such, then, up to Saturday night was the state of affairs in connection with Wild's house.

After that time, some particularly interesting events took place, to which we shall presently direct the reader's attention.

For a little longer, we will confine ourselves to a relation of what happened to Jack Sheppard.

We have said that Saturday night came without the occurrence of any incident of importance.

Jack's mind grew calmer, and he laid himself down to sleep, for so intense a desire of slumber came over him that he found it was impossible to resist.

The reason of this was, Mr. Snoxall had, without his knowledge, caused a tasteless narcotic to be mingled with the last meal he had taken.

Jack ate heartily, and it was after that meal that his mind grew calm and the strong desire for sleep came over him.

He turned his face to the wall, and closed his eyes.

Before he was aware of it he was asleep, and unconscious alike of past, present, and future.

Jonathan dropped off into one of the dozes we have mentioned, and which served him as well as a sound sleep.

And in this manner passed away Saturday night in Newgate.

One more day only had to come and go, and then the time appointed for the execution of Jack Sheppard would arrive.

CHAPTER CCCCXX.

JACK SHEPPARD RESIGNS HIMSELF TO HIS FATE, AND ATTENDS DIVINE SERVICE IN THE CHAPEL.

How long Jack Sheppard's deep slumber would have lasted, had he remained undisturbed, is hard to say.

It seemed, however, that he had only just closed his eyes when he felt some one shaking him by the shoulder and calling aloud.

He woke up at once.

Looking about him, he saw with astonishment that it was already daylight.

At first he could scarcely believe that the night had passed away so quickly.

The sleep had been a deep and sound one.

Almost the first thought which darted into his mind upon awaking was so many more hours of his life had passed away in utter oblivion.

He had one day to live.

His heart ceased to beat and the blood ran cold in his veins when he made these reflections.

Looking up to see by whom he had been awakened and for what purpose, Jack saw Jonathan Wild, Mr. Noakes, Mr. Snoxall and a turnkey:

"Come, Jack, wake up!" said the Governor. "This will

be a busy day for you! Rouse yourself and take some breakfast."

Jack sickened at the sight of food, but that was mainly in consequence of the opiate he had taken the night before.

He rose, however, at their bidding, for he felt it was no use to resist them.

He was thankful for some cold water to wash himself with.

He liberally soused himself with it, and when he had done so felt wonderfully better.

The dull, throbbing, aching pain in his head had disappeared.

The sickly feeling passed away, and he sat down to his breakfast with a hungry gnawing at his stomach.

But every mouthful he swallowed seemed to swell in his throat and choke him.

He was thinking over his dreadful position.

Now that the prospect of death was so close at hand, the horror of his situation was more apparent to him.

Twenty-four hours only had to elapse, and then the time would come when he would take his last look at this world.

Twenty-four hours!

What a brief space of time to look forward to.

And gradually there settled upon Jack's heart the horrible conviction that the end of his life was really very close at hand.

He could not hope to escape now.

Without some miracle occurred to save him he must perish.

Jack thought of Edgworth Bess.

Then his heart swelled until he was unable to bear the pain.

Tears sprang into his eyes.

But he controlled this outward symptom of emotion, though it cost him a sore effort.

He did so, however, for Jonathan's eyes were eagerly fixed upon his countenance, as though he would, if possible, penetrate his thoughts.

"You don't seem quite the thing this morning, Jack, my lad?" he said, for the fourth or fifth time.

As before, Jack disdained to reply.

The jeering, bantering tones in which the thief-taker spoke grated horribly upon the prisoner's ears.

"What a luxury it would be to be alone—by myself!" Jack murmured. "What would I not give to be relieved from the company of this fiend in human shape?"

No doubt Jack would freely have given anything he possessed, but nothing on earth would have tempted Wild to leave him.

And so, after all, it was but a poor breakfast that Jack had that morning.

He thought as he looked about him that he felt like one who was about to die.

To die!

Horrible thought!

He stood but on the threshold of existence.

Life had not opened to him, and he had only caught dim glimpses of the future.

And this was to be the end.

Some voice seemed for ever to be shrieking in his ear:

"Jack Sheppard will be hanged on Tyburn Tree to-morrow morning!"

In vain he tried to close his ears against this sound.

In vain he strove to turn his thoughts into another channel.

Louder and louder grew the imaginary voice, which, after all, was but the echo of his own fears.

Condemned to die!

To know so long beforehand just how long he had to live, and no longer.

To be able to say, to-morrow morning at twelve o'clock I shall cease to live.

I shall be dead.

Oh, it must be horrible—most horrible—to have one's fate staring one thus in the face!

More horrible still to know that nothing could possibly avert the awful doom!

On that Sunday morning Jack first knew what it was to have no hope.

His other imprisonments he had made light of.

He had once before been an inmate of the condemned cell.

But he had made light of it.
His breast had been filled with hope.
He had before him the prospect of escape.
But now how different was it!
He was hopeless.

And there was not the slightest chance of his being able to make his escape.

Nor was it possible for anyone to rescue him.

The closest watch and guard would be kept over him until the hangman's noose was round his neck.

And if all these thoughts were not enough to drive him to distraction, there was Jonathan Wild glaring at him, and continually making some triumphant, jeering remark.

Jack had to bite his tongue several times to control the impulse he felt to reply to several of them.

But he had made up his mind to studiously resist being drawn into an altercation of any kind with his persecutor.

Jack gave up his breakfast in despair.

He could not eat, and yet he felt a craving for food.

Shortly afterwards—it was indeed about half-past ten—the Governor and a turnkey entered the cell.

Mr. Noakes glanced from the half-eaten meal to Jonathan Wild.

"Not a very good appetite this morning, eh?" said the Governor.

"Not very," said Wild, in reply, with a horrible chuckle.

"Don't you often find the appetite fall off on Sunday?"

"Oh, very often, Mr. Wild."

"But some die game?"

"Uncommon."

"What do you think of our friend Jack?"

"In what way?"

"As to dying game?"

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Wild. You see, he is one of the crowing sort, Mr. Wild."

"He is."

"And there is one thing I have always noticed with respect to the crowing sort."

"What is that?"

"Why, they make a great display when there's no danger, but when the critical moment arrives——"

"Then——"

"Then, Mr. Wild, I assure you they show the white feather, and invariably die like a snail."

"Do you hear that, Jack?" asked the thief-taker.

But Sheppard remained silent, and looked as though he had not heard what was said.

Of course he understood the motive which prompted this little bit of conversation.

It was done for the purpose of aggravating him.

And although the words they uttered, and which he could not avoid listening to, rankled a reply in his heart, Jack preserved sufficient self-command to prevent any traces of his feelings being seen in his countenance.

The breakfast was removed, and then the Governor said:

"Come, Jack, prepare yourself!"

"For what?" asked Sheppard.

"To go to chapel."

"And pray for your life to be spared!" added Wild, with a derisive laugh.

Jack knew it would be folly to attempt any resistance to this, and so he said:

"I am ready."

"Make yourself look smart, Jack," said the Governor.

"The chapel will be crowded with fashionable folks. Many ladies of quality will be there."

Jack coloured with shame and vexation.

But he could not help himself.

He was destined to be made an exhibition of.

And now several more turnkeys entered the cell, and Mr. Noakes informed Jack that he must prepare to start.

Jack rose to his feet at once.

And now a curious thought entered his mind.

Would Jonathan Wild accompany him to the chapel? he asked himself.

The question was soon answered.

Jonathan also rose to his feet.

The Governor looked at him.

"Are you going to the chapel, Mr. Wild?"

"Yes, I am. Why shouldn't I?" asked the thief-taker.

"Ahem—well, Mr. Wild," stammered the Governor. "If I might speak."

"Go on, curse you!"

"Well, then, you don't look just the article for going to chapel?"

"Oh, don't I?"

"No, you don't."

"And who the devil told you to trouble your head about it? Mind your own business, and I will mind mine! I shall sit in the pew by the side of Jack."

The Governor, of course, did not dare say nay to anything the thief-taker might announce his intention to do, and so he turned to his men, and bullied them for not getting ready to start.

But really the Governor was quite justified in making the remarks he did respecting Wild's appearance.

That worthy was never very particular with respect to his toilette, and we will just remind the reader of the following, which will enable him perhaps to form some idea of the thief-taker's appearance.

In the first place, then, to go back to the night of the fire, Wild had very hastily attired himself, and the effect produced was rather grotesque.

In addition to this, we know how he was knocked about in his endeavour to prevent the escape of the fugitives, and how he was burned and scorched by the fire, and how he was blackened by the smoke.

Then he had had some more adventures, which will be fresh in the recollection of the reader, none of which were calculated to improve his personal appearance, but rather the reverse.

That wound in the throat, too, which he had received at Blueskin's hands, must not be forgotten.

While in the cell watching over Jack no water had ever touched his hands or face, nor had he attempted to smooth his shock of hair.

Altogether, then, we may go so far as to say that he was anything but a creditable specimen of humanity.

It was also only natural that the Governor should make the remark he did.

But Jonathan Wild was in the habit of setting all social proprieties at defiance, and he did so on the present occasion.

Although he had the time and opportunity to make himself look a little more presentable, he declined to do so, and announced his intention of going to the chapel just as he was.

The Governor groaned, but he was so deeply in Wild's power that he could not have denied his request if it had been ten times more extravagant than it was.

And now the procession got itself in readiness to start.

There were three turnkeys, Jack, the Governor, and Jonathan Wild, so that the little party numbered six persons altogether.

True to the purpose he had announced, and which up to the present moment he had carried out to the very letter, Jonathan Wild walked by the side of his prisoner.

In life he would never part from him—no, not for a single moment.

The gloomy corridors of Newgate were threaded in silence.

The only sound that broke upon the stillness was the dull echo which followed the tramp of their feet upon the stone flags.

How familiar the route of the chapel was to Jack.

How vividly, too, was brought back to his mind the recollection of how he had last passed through those passages.

At last the door leading into the chapel was reached.

Jack looked at it; but the spike which he had been at so much pains to break off had been replaced.

The man who stood at this door unlocked and opened it to allow the party to pass through.

That part of the chapel set aside for the accommodation of the prisoners was unoccupied.

But the galleries where spectators were allowed to sit were crowded with fashionably-attired people.

CHAPTER CCCCXXXI.

JONATHAN WILD IS DISCONCERTED BY JACK SHEPPARD'S PROPHECICAL REMARKS.

PLACED as the reader is in full possession of all the circumstances attending Jack Sheppard's extraordinary

career, he will have no doubt that the capture of so notorious a character produced an immense amount of excitement in the City of London.

At the time of which we write it was the custom to allow the public to sit in the chapel belonging to the prison, and hear the condemned sermon, as it is called, preached to those trembling wretches who were doomed to suffer for their crimes on the morrow.

On most occasions there was generally a good gathering of spectators, for there were many who delighted to note the differences in the demeanour of those whose term of life was to be cut short.

When any particular malefactor, however, was placed in the pew set aside for such a purpose, then the utmost anxiety was manifested to obtain a seat, and the galleries were crowded to suffocation.

But when it became known that the condemned sermon was to be preached upon Jack Sheppard on the following Sunday, there was such a demand for seats as had never been known before.

All those persons who had the privilege of granting tickets of admission were literally besieged by applications.

Within two hours after the intelligence became known, tickets had been issued to more persons than could possibly be crammed into the space allotted for them.

Of course, those of distinguished rank—and there were many such beneath the roof of Newgate Chapel that Sunday morning—had the preference over those who were not so nobly born.

Only one rule could be followed with respect to the seats, and that was that those persons who entered first would have the best.

In consequence of this, at a very early hour in the morning a large crowd had assembled round the door.

At last, about an hour and a half before service would commence, the doors were opened.

The galleries were filled in a moment.

A large concourse of people was left outside then, and more kept arriving every minute.

That hour and a half in the crowded gallery must have been terribly trying to the patience, but the spectators stood the test bravely.

But there was a great amount of excitement when the door was opened.

Hundreds of eyes were in a moment riveted upon Jack Sheppard, for the curiosity felt by everyone to catch a glimpse of his countenance was something marvellous.

But public attention was very quickly attracted to Jonathan Wild, for the fact of his having shared the cell with the prisoner and his motives for doing so were tolerably well known.

Comments upon the appearance of both the prisoner and the thief-taker passed freely from mouth to mouth.

As might be imagined, Jonathan's extraordinary appearance created a great deal of remark.

The door of the pew was unlocked, and a turnkey entered.

Jack followed next.

After him came Jonathan Wild.

Then three more turnkeys.

The pew was then quite full, and another person could not possibly have been squeezed into it.

Jack shrunk from coming into such close contact with his implacable enemy.

Jonathan noticed it, with a grin, and pressed closer to him, simply because he knew it to be an annoyance.

It was many a day since Jonathan Wild had been seen in a place of worship, and now he winked, and blinked, and looked about him as curiously as an owl.

At last he looked up at the gallery.

Then, when he saw anyone's eyes fixed upon him—particularly if it was a female—he would distort his countenance into a hideous grin, and nod his head on one side as though in token of recognition.

Surely, never before had the public gaze been favoured with such an extraordinary spectacle.

As for Jack, he folded his arms and leaned back in his seat with an assumption of ease that he was very far, indeed, from feeling.

He endeavoured to look as calm and unconcerned as he possibly could, and really succeeded very well.

When the spectators saw his slight, slim, and boyish figure, they could scarcely believe that they were looking

upon Jack Sheppard, who had made all the country ring with his exploits.

They could scarcely think it possible that one so slender and delicate looking could have thrice broken out of such a fortress as Newgate was.

The prevailing feeling in the hearts of almost everyone who saw him was sympathy and compassion.

It really did seem hard for one so young and harmless looking to die so soon, and to die, too, such an ignominious death.

Then the attention of the public was directed to another spectacle.

The other prisoners confined in Newgate were marshaled in by the turnkeys and seated in the pews.

In Jack Sheppard's time, and for many years afterwards, Newgate was not exclusively a criminal prison, but debtors also were confined in it.

Even now, one of the best known entrances to the present prison is called the debtors' door.

The debtors then were first brought into the chapel, and put in their proper places.

Then the criminals were brought in.

The turnkeys, and other officials belonging to the prison, except those who were compelled to be on duty, then followed.

A silence of some few minutes succeeded.

Then the chaplain of the prison, or ordinary as he was called, entered.

He was attired in full canonicals like any other clergyman of the established church.

He walked straight up to the reading-desk.

He was tall and stout—almost as tall, and stout, and sleek as his successor, who died so mysteriously in an omnibus the other day.

As he came along the aisle, he wiped his lips in rather an undignified manner with the back of his hand.

The fact was, the gelatinous portions of a meal he had just taken were clinging about his mouth.

In a thick, unctuous voice, and with as rapid an utterance as his scanty breath would permit, he read over the prayers.

But it is not our intention to enter into the details of the service.

Very few, indeed, paid the least attention to the ordinary's words.

The strangers in the gallery came there to see the sight, and not to listen, and so they were not auditors.

Jonathan Wild kept his eyes open and glared about him for a little while.

Then he closed those bleared and bloodshot orbs of vision, to the intense relief of everybody, and dropped off into one of those cat-like dozes we have so often mentioned, and from which the least thing would serve to arouse him.

Jack Sheppard, with his eyes fixed upon vacancy, soon became oblivious of the ordinary's droning voice.

His thoughts were busy and far away.

He was thinking of Blueskin and of Edgworth Bess.

He wondered whether it was possible that he had taken his last look of her in this world.

His fears whispered to him that he had—that he would never see her more, or hear her sweet voice again.

Then something like a groan would come to his lips, which, with a powerful effort, he would subdue into a sob.

Jack's eyes were open.

If he closed them, even for ever so short a time, a terrific sight appeared before him.

That was the triple tree at Tyburn, surrounded by a crowd of eager, curious people, all anxious to feast their eyes upon his death agony.

And so, what with thinking of his comrade, and of her he loved a thousand times better than his own life—what with thinking of his own terrible position and approaching fate—Jack paid very little attention to the service.

And then the turnkeys.

To be sure, they sat still and listened, but it was in a mechanical sort of way.

It had become with them a portion of their duty, and they went through it merely as a piece of routine.

The Governor, as was his custom, leaned back in his seat, closed his eyes, and pretended to listen.

But in reality he was fast asleep.

And so the only persons who remained to pay attention



[STEGGS AT THE HOUSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE.]

were the prisoners, and we are very much afraid that they were too busy looking about them, and thinking of their own affairs to do so.

And then the ordinary commenced the condemned sermon.

He was listened to at first, but soon attention returned and centred upon Jack Sheppard.

At last, to the infinite relief of the latter, the service was concluded.

The debtors and criminal prisoners were first removed, and consigned to their respective cells.

Then Jonathan woke up, and accompanied Jack Sheppard back to the strong room.

"Curse it, Jack!" he said, loud enough for the people in the galleries to hear, "I'm d—d glad that you are going to be tucked up to-morrow, and so are you, I should think, for I am tired of this sort of work, and shall be glad when it's over!"

No. 90.—BLUESKIN.

Jack took no notice of this speech.

The remainder of the day passed drearily enough.

Exposed during the whole of that time to the jeers and insults of Jonathan Wild, Jack's existence was perfect misery.

At length, however, Jonathan wrought him up to such a pitch that he started to his feet, and seemed as though he was about to rush upon him.

But if such had been his intention it was abandoned as soon as formed, and Jack sat down upon his seat again.

"Villain!" he shrieked, in uncontrollable passion. "I would rush upon you and crush the life out of your loathsome carcass, did I not feel that by so doing I should be conferring kindness upon you!"

"Ha, ha! much obliged, I am sure!"

"Jonathan Wild," said Jack, "I would try my best to take your life, even if I had to sacrifice my own to do so, but for one circumstance."

"What is that?"

"You may affect to ridicule and despise my words, but they are nevertheless true! I prophecy—"

"Then you believe you are near death? People near death always prophecy."

"I prophesy," continued Jack, unheeding the interruption, "that you will finish your life upon the gallows!"

Wild started.

"Beware!" he cried furiously.

At that moment there flashed across his mind the prophecy so singularly made by the old woman on the bridge.

Her words seemed to ring in his ears still, and it was through their influence that he called out to Jack to beware.

"Beware of what?" said Sheppard, furiously. "My words will come true—you will swing at Tyburn."

"Ha, ha!"

"You cannot pass it off with a laugh!"

"Don't talk such nonsense, Jack!" returned the thief-taker. "It would be more sensible if I was to prophesy such a thing of you! Ha, ha!"

"Jonathan Wild, I tell you again my words will come true, and not only that, I have a firm and deep-settled conviction that I shall be present in the crowd, and witness your last look upon earth before the rope is put round your neck!"

"Ha, ha!" said Jonathan, but his voice was unnaturally shrill and cracked. "What could be more ridiculous? You witness my execution? Yah, ha! It is folly, I say! It is not likely we shall change places! Ha, ha!"

"Whether or not, you will see my words will come true!" repeated Jack, who said the words, not from any particular conviction of his own concerning their truth, but because he saw they produced an effect upon his persecutor.

It was simply tit-for-tat.

"Wait till to-morrow, Jack! You will see then where your prophecy will be! At twelve o'clock to-morrow you will swing, as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow!"

With a sickening heart, Jack confessed to himself that this was true.

"No power on earth can save you, Jack, and it would be preposterous to suppose that a miracle would happen in your favour. Do you remember, Jack, I swore to hang you? I swore to do it, and I never fail to keep my word. You will hang, and at noon to-morrow! You see I have triumphed!"

Jack was silent.

Evening was coming on, and so once more, with a sigh of weariness, he flung himself upon the wretched bed.

"Can such a horrible thing be really true?" he muttered. "Can this be real? Is this, indeed, the last night which I shall spend upon this earth?"

A voice in his own heart seemed to reply with mournful vehemence:

"Yes—yes—yes!"

CHAPTER CCCCXXXII.

JONATHAN WILD IS THREATENED BY AN UNSUSPECTED AND TERRIBLE DANGER.

AND so passed Sunday night in Newgate.

If the truth must be told, Jonathan Wild felt even more anxious about the morrow than did Jack, Sheppard himself.

All the time he kept asking himself, was it possible he was on the point of consummating those schemes which, in their prosecution, had caused him so much discomfiture and trouble?

Apparently all was well.

That Jack Sheppard would be executed on the morrow seemed as certain as any future event possibly could.

Then, when that was over, and his most formidable enemy removed, what would be easier than for him to seek out Edgworth Bess, and compel her to accede to his demands?

Yes, surely all would be well.

He rubbed his huge, dirt-begrimed hands together in his satisfaction, as he pictured to himself how easily he should succeed in his future plans after Jack Sheppard was out of the way.

Oh yes, the moment of triumph had arrived, and his whole frame thrilled with horrible exultation.

And yet at times there would come over him a strange sensation of doubt and dread, and though he banished the feeling every time it made itself manifest, yet it kept recurring with irrepressible perseverance.

But he would not suffer this to make him at all uncomfortable—that is, he made up his mind to that effect.

Who shall doubt that there is truth in the saying, "Coming events cast their shadows before?"

It was the shadow of coming events which depressed Jonathan Wild at the moment of his anticipated triumph, in spite of all his efforts.

Could he have known what was taking place on that particular evening, he would not have wondered at his feelings.

Events were occurring which he never dreamed of—events that were destined to work a total change in his fortunes and prospects.

Danger was hovering over him.

He was reaching the summit of his success; the crowning hour of his triumph he fancied was at hand. But Wild ought to have known that when the highest point has been reached descent is inevitable.

Leaving, for a short time, Jack Sheppard and his persecutor alone together in that Newgate cell—the former to ponder over his approaching fate, and the latter to glut himself with expected triumph—we will relate what was taking place outside the prison.

The reader, we feel sure, has not forgotten Steggs.

When we last saw him was upon the occasion of his truly miraculous escape from Wild's house.

A strong degree of interest must of necessity attach itself to him and to all his proceedings, from the simple fact of his having in his possession those papers so important to the interests of Edgworth Bess.

It will be remembered that the packet of papers which, at the peril of his life, he had plucked out of the fire, contained not only the will of the real Lord Donnull, and papers necessary to prove the identity of Edgworth Bess, but also a document which comprised a full account of Jonathan Wild's villainies and enormities, so far as they had come under Abel Donnull's notice.

Steggs, however, although in possession of these all-important documents, had never had an opportunity of examining them in any way, and had only a general idea as to their character.

It will be remembered that after his fearful fall from the window, although he had been caught in the stranger's cloak, it was found that he was in a death-like swoon.

Consequently, he was carried off, without delay, to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, close by, where every attention was paid to him.

Upon recovering his senses, the first thing he did was to carry his hand to the breast of his coat, where he had deposited the precious papers.

A sigh of relief issued from his lips when he found they were secure, nor would he suffer anyone to remove his hand from them.

He held them with a grasp of iron.

It was found that the burns he had sustained were merely superficial ones, and not at all dangerous.

The chief ailment was his state of utter prostration; but this, under the doctor's hands, was soon improved.

Slowly, then, day by day did Steggs improve.

True to his purpose, he kept the papers in his hand both by day and night.

At last—and this was on the Saturday—he was strong enough to sit up and make an examination of them.

He had little guessed their importance, and when he read the statement which Lord Donnull had written with reference to Jonathan Wild, his eyes fairly burned with satisfaction.

He laid down in bed, and strove to think clearly, and to decide upon the course of action which would be best for him to pursue.

He was bewildered.

He was a poor, weak, scarcely living wretch, and Jonathan Wild was in the full plenitude of his power.

How, then, was he to hope to obtain a victory over such an enemy?

The greatest care would be required, otherwise he would be foiled, and then it would be farewell, not only to all hopes of the poor heiress being reinstated in her rights, but also to his own deep and long-cherished hopes of vengeance.

In painful thought the whole of that day and night were spent, and when Sunday morning dawned he was no nearer to a solution of his difficulties than he was before.

It so happened, however, that an accident enabled him to come to a conclusion when careful thought had failed.

In the morning, as was the usual custom, the physicians belonging to the hospital made their tour of the sick wards.

Two of them were talking as they approached the bed upon which Steggs lay. Unconsciously at first he listened to their words, but soon he strained his hearing to the utmost to catch at the sense of what they said.

"I never knew a change to take place so quickly," said the first.

"Nor I. I scarcely think it true."

"There is no doubt about it. Who would have thought of such a thing? My conviction was that the late Government had retained office for a long time to come."

"And mine."

"No doubt they would have done so, but for the fact of some very questionable and corrupt transactions on the part of the Secretary of State for the Home Department having come to light."

"Do you know their nature?"

"No, I do not, though rumour, of course, is very busy. This, at least, is certain—the Whigs are now in power, and a close inquiry is to be made into the doings of the late Secretary of State."

"It is very sudden."

"Very—very!"

Such was the conversation which Steggs happened to overhear, and the effect it produced upon him was very extraordinary.

He seemed to become quite a new man, and that was because he saw the way out of his difficulties.

He strove to be calm—to think clearly, and, above all, to do nothing rashly.

Steggs's chief difficulty had arisen from the fact of Jonathan Wild having been employed to do some dirty work by the Government which he had learned had just gone out of office.

Under such circumstances, he was quite convinced it would be the height of folly to make any complaints against Jonathan Wild.

As a matter of course they would not be listened to—or, if listened to, would be hushed up as quickly as possible, because of the fear they would have that Jonathan Wild would make some unpleasant disclosures.

But that was all altered now; if a change of the ministry had really taken place, and the late Secretary dismissed in disgrace, all that he had to say would be listened to with the greatest pleasure and attention.

All are ready to kick a man who is going down-hill, and the new Secretary would certainly be an enemy of the old one.

Steggs felt his heart grow light when he thought the matter over from first to last.

"Now I shall have my revenge!" he murmured. "Jonathan Wild, the moment of your downfall is at hand! Hitherto things have prospered with you, but now the tide has turned! Oh, if I were strong and well! Am I not better—am I not stronger already? Yes—yes! I can feel my old strength has come back to me—I am well!"

But the sudden accession of strength which he felt was not real.

It was that factitious strength which excitement so often produces, and which departs as quickly as it comes, leaving a double sense of weakness behind it.

Looking up, Steggs saw that the day was fast closing in.

For a moment he lay quite still.

Then he murmured:

"Yes—yes, I will go! I will dally no longer! How can I tell what will be the consequence of delay? I will go! I will seek out this new Secretary of State at once! In his hands I will deposit this packet of precious papers—to him I will make a full confession of all I know concerning Jonathan Wild! Then we shall see the results! I feel that the hour of vengeance is at hand! Yes, I will go!"

When he had arrived at this determination, Steggs was even stronger than before, or fancied he was, and rose.

No one was at hand to watch him, and his clothes were folded up near the head of the bed.

He attired himself hastily, and, clutching the packet tightly in his hand, crept out of the ward.

A nurse made an attempt to stop him, but he hurried past her and descended the steps.

He was allowed to leave without further attempt at molestation or hindrance.

Upon reaching the open air, he staggered and almost fell.

Recovering himself, he crept slowly onward.

Night was coming on fast.

He had not a penny in his pocket, so it was out of the question for him to hire any conveyance.

Slowly and wearily he made his way along the streets.

It was not, however, until he had gone some distance that he recollected it was Sunday evening.

He paused irresolutely.

On that day no business was transacted, and he feared the Secretary would not see him.

What should he do? Turn back?

No; he made up his mind that at all risks he would go forward, and not give up without making an effort.

On he went again, but more slowly than before.

His intellects were in a confused state, or he would have been conscious that he was ignorant of the Secretary's address.

He had not the remotest idea where he lived.

He was rather at a loss, too, to know where he should obtain the information.

He could think of no better plan than to go direct to the Houses of Parliament; and, accordingly, this was what he did.

After some trouble, he obtained from an official there the Secretary of State's address.

It was Spring Gardens, St. James's Park.

Thither poor Steggs dragged his weary body.

Feeling as though he could not have gone a dozen yards further had his life depended on it, Steggs crept up the steps before a handsome-looking house.

He paused doubtfully, and hesitated to raise the knocker.

He was afraid that the reception he would meet with would be anything but a welcome one.

He was giddy, and sick, and faint, for he had left the hospital long before he was strong and well enough to do so.

For some time he stood upon the steps, not daring to raise the knocker.

At last he summoned up courage enough to give a feeble summons for admission.

It was so feeble that it was disregarded.

Oh, if Jonathan Wild had only have been aware of Steggs's intentions at that moment, how easily could he have crushed him!

As easily as he could have crushed a worm.

But the thief-taker—sitting in the cell with his eyes gloating over Jack Sheppard—gave no heed to the danger that might arise from that quarter.

Such a thing never entered his mind.

He was ignorant even of the fact that a change in the ministry had taken place.

Steggs knocked again, and this time the door was opened.

When the domestic saw what a ragged, scarecrow-looking object stood upon the threshold, he attempted to shut the door again.

Steggs had expected it, so he glided in like a shadow.

"I want to see the Secretary of State!" he said, in a hollow voice.

The lackey looked aghast.

"It is most important!" continued Steggs, clutching the packet of papers tightly. "Let him know at once that I am here!"

The lackey looked all the surprise he felt, and seemed very much in doubt whether to attend to the strange visitor's request or not.

But there was something so earnest and so pleading in the manner in which Steggs looked or spoke, that he felt constrained to comply.

"I will announce to his lordship that you are here," he said, at length; "but I tell you candidly that I don't think he will see you. Besides, it is Sunday."

"I know that!" Steggs gasped.

"If you were to tell me your business, it might be the means of your obtaining an interview."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. The first question he will ask when I announce you will be—'What does he want?'"

"Tell him, then," said Steggs, "that I want to see him upon an affair of the utmost importance—upon matters connected with the late Secretary of State and Jonathan Wild!"

"The great thief-taker?"

"Yes."

"Then you will be welcome."

"Why—why?"

"It was but the other day that I heard his lordship say that the continued existence of a wretch like Jonathan Wild is a disgrace to the nation at large!"

"Did he say that?"

"Yes, I heard him; and, what was more, he said that he would willingly do all he could to punish such a rascally villain!"

"You can tell him, then," said Steggs, "that I am one of Jonathan Wild's victims—that I barely escaped with my life from his house, which was, as you know, burned to the ground."

"Yes, yes—but you—where have you been since?"

"In the hospital."

"I will tell his lordship. Take my word for it, he will only be too glad to see you!"

CHAPTER CCCCXXXIII.

STEGGS MAKES A FULL REVELATION OF JONATHAN WILD'S ATROCITIES TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

THE lackey who admitted Steggs had indeed heard the new Secretary of State make some such remarks with reference to Jonathan Wild, and it was lucky for Steggs that he happened to have such a feeling in the matter.

But the fact was, the new Secretary was an upright, conscientious, honourable man, and he detested his predecessor, not only because he belonged to the opposite faction, but because of the mean and dirty actions of which he had been guilty.

It had been whispered to him that the thief-taker and the late Secretary had had some nefarious transactions together, and he felt annoyed to think that one who stood in such a high position as his predecessor, should stoop to make use of so base a tool.

When, therefore, he heard that Steggs was able to disclose something about their dealings together, he gave immediate orders for him to be admitted, although it was Sunday night.

The lackey came into the hall again, where Steggs was waiting, and told him that the Secretary would accord an interview.

With a beating heart, Steggs entered a beautifully-furnished room, which, being only dimly lighted, looked even more magnificent than it really was.

Sitting in an easy chair was a thin, pale, elderly gentleman.

He looked up when Steggs entered, and then he said:

"You have some information to give me about Jonathan Wild?"

Steggs bent his head.

He could not speak, but, tottering forward, placed in the Secretary's hands the packet of papers he had been at so much trouble to obtain and retain possession of.

The Secretary looked at them with surprise; then, perceiving how faint and exhausted Steggs looked, desired him to be seated.

Willingly enough, he sank down into one of the luxuriously-cushioned chairs.

With eager haste, the Secretary opened the parcel.

The reader may imagine his surprise when he became acquainted with its contents.

But the paper in which Abel Donnull had confessed at length the nature of his dealings with Jonathan Wild arrested the whole of his attention.

He read it eagerly from first to last, nor did he raise his eyes until he had done.

Then, without a word, he looked over the other papers.

"Why," he said, at last breaking the silence, "this is a most extraordinary affair!"

"It is, my lord, and I hope I have done right by placing those papers in your hands."

"You have; for I will make it my business to see that justice is done to the injured and oppressed."

"That is all I desire, my lord," replied Steggs, who then entered into an account of the whole of the circumstances connected with Edgworth Bess, Jack Sheppard, and Lord Donnull.

He also made him acquainted with all that had come under his notice during his stay in Wild's house.

As the reader may expect, the disclosures were of a very serious nature.

We have not repeated the statement made by Steggs, because we judged it unnecessary to do so, as all the events must be too well remembered to need repetition.

What he heard had the effect of producing an entire change in the Secretary's mind with respect to the opinions he had entertained of Jack Sheppard, and he was compelled to come to the conclusion that the crimes he had committed had been forced upon him rather than otherwise.

When Steggs had finished his narrative, the Secretary told him to help himself to some wine that was on the table; and, having done so, he leaned his face upon his hand, and gazed into the fire reflectively.

At length, having finished his meditations, he looked up.

"You will swear that all you have told me is the truth?"

"I will, my lord!"

"And what has been your motive in seeking me out and making these revelations?"

"To speak frankly and truly, my lord—because of the many injuries I have received at the hands of Jonathan Wild."

"A good and sufficient reason. Had you given any other, I should not have felt half so sure of your integrity as I do now. But this Jack Sheppard—are you sure that you have not been misinformed concerning him? He has been represented to me in a very different light."

"But that would be through the malice of Jonathan Wild, my lord."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so!"

"You may be sure of it; and sure, as well, that all I have told you concerning Jack Sheppard is the truth."

"I am sorry to hear it!"

"Sorry, my lord?"

"Yes! Are you not aware that he is a condemned prisoner in a cell in Newgate, and that to-morrow morning is appointed for his execution?"

"No, my lord—I did not know it! I have only just come out of the hospital. Jonathan Wild, then, believes the hour of his triumph is at hand."

"In one respect it certainly is!"

"As how, my lord?"

"With respect to Jack Sheppard."

"Must he perish, my lord?"

"I cannot save him. On the clearest evidence he has been found guilty of crimes the penalty of which is death. He has three times broken out of Newgate! There is no help for it! Let his excuses be as great as they may, the sentence pronounced against him must be carried into effect!"

"I have not come here to plead his cause," said Steggs, "but simply to place facts before you in their true light. I have no motive for interesting myself in Jack Sheppard's favour. In my opinion he is a hot-headed fool, and deserves his fate! Had it not been for him I should not have suffered such a world of agony as I have!"

"Well, well—I have nothing to do with that! As for Jonathan Wild, I shall know how to take my measures with respect to him; as for yourself, you will consider yourself as under arrest until the charges you have made have been substantiated."

"I am quite ready and willing to submit myself entirely to your lordship."

"I can expect no more; and these papers—you say you are willing that I should retain possession of them?"

"Certainly, my lord; but I surrender them to you upon the understanding that you will take proper steps to instate this poor girl, who is undoubtedly the heiress, in possession of her property."

"My duty leads me to do so."

"That is all, then, my lord—except that I am very weak and ill, and have nowhere to go to, and—and no money."

"Perhaps it is quite as well that you have not, because it will furnish me with a means of still further testing the extent of your good faith. For the present, you will take up your abode under that roof."

Steggs was only too glad to consent to such an arrangement, being, as it was, in every way advantageous to him.

The Secretary then summoned a domestic, to whom he issued his instructions concerning Steggs, who then left the apartment.

After his departure, the Secretary rested his face in his hand again—a favourite attitude of his whenever he was puzzled or perplexed about anything—and carefully thought over all that had passed during this singular interview.

Having done so, he hastily wrote a letter, and then summoned the domestic again.

"Have that letter sent off with all speed—it is most important!"

The servant bowed and withdrew, and, glancing at the superscription of the letter, saw that it was addressed to the Chief Police Officer in London.

Did Wild think there was such a storm brewing overhead?

Could there possibly be any connection between those gloomy doubts and fears, which we have described as coming over him, and the events which had just taken place?

If there was a connection Wild was ignorant of it, though he certainly had a vague presentiment of coming danger.

But as to the nature of what was going forward he knew nothing.

In reality, his long and successful but criminal career was coming to an end.

Justice at last was taking his case into her hands.

There was no longer a corrupt Secretary of State—the instrument of a still more corrupt Government, who would stand as a shield between him and his enemies.

On the contrary, a man was in power who would do all he could to consign him to the ignominious death he so richly deserved.

The reader can guess at the nature of the communication which was sent by the Secretary to the Chief of Police.

Immediately upon receipt of the missive, the individual last mentioned made all speed to Spring Gardens; and, upon arriving there, was shown at once into the presence of the Secretary.

With the details of what took place between them during this interview we need not trouble the reader.

It will be enough to say that the Secretary related at full length all that Steggs had confided to him.

The Chief of Police at once made up his mind as to what had best be done, and his plans were fully approved of by the Secretary, who gave his sanction that they should be carried out without further delay.

This terminated the conference.

By the time the Secretary reached the street midnight had pealed forth from the thousand-and-one churches in the metropolis.

The Chief of the Police went direct to Bow Street, and within half an hour of his arrival there two of the most responsible officers of the force left it.

They made their way through the silent streets in the direction of Jonathan Wild's abode.

At length they reached the spot upon which the gloomy, ruinous tenement had stood.

We have already stated that some police officers had been stationed here in order to keep off all intruders.

These two officers were well known to the subordinates, and they listened respectfully to what was said.

The next moment, the two police officers stood within the walls of the building.

At that lonely hour they were not afraid that their movements would be watched by any prying eye.

One of them produced from his coat-pocket something which looked almost like a torch.

This he lighted, and by its means a ruddy light was cast upon the ruins.

The spectacle was one of desolation.

These two officers, however, were old hands, and were accustomed to see such sights as lay before them.

The only interest they felt in looking about them arose

from the fact that the house belonged to Jonathan Wild.

In a skilful and methodical manner, they first set about making a thorough examination of the *debris* of the fire, which lay in heaps upon the ground.

This was all patiently and carefully turned over, but without resulting in any particular discovery; for so great was the heat of the fire, that those things which in a general way were incombustible had been reduced to ashes.

While searching about the foundations of the house, they came at length to that which they had particularly come to find, namely, the entrance to the cellar, which Wild, in defiance of the laws, had constructed and christened "Little Newgate."

"Here you are at last!" said one of the officers. "You may depend this is it."

"Oh, yes!" returned the other, "as I told you coming along, I had heard there was such a place, but I never believed it—I always treated it as a joke in fact."

"There seems no doubt about the reality of it now though. You go first, as you have the torch, and I will follow."

Those steps which led down from the iron grating in the passage in Wild's house to the corridor from which the cells opened looked anything but inviting, but the officer descended them unflinchingly with his comrade by his side, rather than following him.

The air in the corridor was close and sickly, but the fresh, cool air rushed down from the opening they had made above, and momentarily improved its quality.

One glance was quite enough to convince the police officers that the information they had received was indeed correct.

On both sides of the corridor strong doors were visible, which, from their strength and general appearance, evidently led into cells.

"What is to be done now, mate?" said the officer who carried the torch. "Shall we go right on and examine the place before us, or look into the cells one by one?"

"Let us begin by going into the cells first. We shall save time by so doing."

"So we shall. You have the tools for opening the doors. Get them ready, and I will hold the light!"

The second officer produced from his pockets a complete set of housebreaking implements, and, selecting those most suitable for the job, commenced an attack upon the roof before him.

It soon yielded before his efforts.

With feelings of greater curiosity than they had experienced for many years, the two police officers pushed open the door. Upon entering, they found a place presenting all the ordinary appearance of a cell, except that the floor of it was much below the level of the passage.

In this cell they found nothing of importance, though their keen, practised eyes easily detected that the cell had been very recently occupied.

There was nothing to be gained from a protracted stay in this place, and so they quitted it.

Crossing over, they went to the door of the cell opposite to the one they had just searched.

This, too, was empty, though, like the other, it furnished traces of occupation.

With the like result, the other cells were searched in succession, until at length the officers stood, as it seemed, at the end of the corridor.

A blank wall was before them, in which there were no signs of a door.

So far, then, their discovery went no further than having found the cells themselves, which was, at any rate, corroborative of the truth of the information given them.

They had also been told that there was a secret door in the wall at the end of the corridor, though very cleverly concealed.

This entirely baffled them for some time; but, having the clue, they searched closely, and were finally rewarded for their trouble.

The spring was discovered, and, being pressed upon, caused the door to fly open.

The often-described corridor lay beyond.

The officers crossed the threshold of the secret door, and stood in the inner passage, with a strange fluttering feeling about their hearts, as though they knew they were on

the brink of making some discoveries of tremendous import.

Here, if anywhere, might they expect to find out some of Wild's secrets.

The place had all that appearance.

But the doors of several cells were opened without anything being found within them.

At last they passed before a cell door which has often been mentioned to the reader.

With some difficulty they forced it open.

All within was silent, though the air had a strange, clammy, disagreeable flavour.

The officers felt their hearts heave, but the one who carried the torch held it high above his head, in order that its rays might be thoroughly diffused.

His companion kept close by his side.

In an instant, both at the same time, they distinguished lying on the floor of the cell something which gleamed with a horrible, ghastly whiteness.

They approached hastily, and paused suddenly.

One glance was enough to reveal to them what that ghastly white something was.

It was a human skeleton.

CHAPTER CCCCXXXIV.

THE TWO POLICE OFFICERS DISCOVER THE SKELETON OF ABEL DONMULL IN THE CELLS BENEATH WILD'S HOUSE.

It seems strange that the skeleton of a human being should be such a universal object of loathing and abhorrence as it is.

No one can regard it without a shudder, and the eyes are averted by the dreadful sight by what appears to be a peculiar kind of instinct.

Even those old and well-tried police officers, who had been prepared to find something in those cells of a most horrible nature, shrank back when they beheld the ghastly skeleton at their feet.

But it was only on the impulse of the moment that they did so.

Recovering from this natural feeling, they once more advanced, until they were quite close to the dreadful object.

Then stooping down, and holding the torch so that the principal portion of its light fell upon it, the two officers commenced making an examination of the skeleton.

For some moments both looked in silence, but suddenly one spoke.

"It is easy to see how it is we find the skeleton in such a state as this. Look! Do you perceive that the bones are perfectly polished—that not a fragment of flesh or integument adheres to any one of them—and that, in fact, all that remains besides the bones are the cartilages by which the framework is held together? I have seen many a skeleton in my time, but this is not the natural appearance for it to present."

"It is not. I fully agree with you there. I never saw the bones so clean—they look as though they had been scraped with a knife."

"They are as well polished as if they had been; but they have not—they have been scraped by the rats!"

The other officer shuddered.

The idea was a horrible one.

The one who had spoken had expressed himself in tones of deliberate conviction, and he was no doubt perfectly correct.

He continued:

"These cells swarm with rats and all such vermin, and this dead body, lying here as it evidently must have done, would tempt them all to come forth. Then they would have the horrible banquet, nor would they cease until they had picked the bones as clean as you see."

"It is frightful to think of such a thing—horrible in the extreme! Who was the unfortunate person, I wonder?"

"That I hope we shall discover, as well as whether he received his death by violence. Come closer! What is that glittering?"

The officer, as he spoke, pointed to one of the fleshless hands.

"It must be a ring! Yes—that is it!"

"We must have it, then!"

The officer shrank from touching the frightful object;

but it was necessary that they should obtain possession of the ring, and so, overcoming his scruples, he drew it off.

The first thing they then did was to examine it attentively.

It was a large plain stone, in a very massive gold setting.

Upon it was engraved a crest, or some device of a similar character.

It was quite uninjured.

The rats, in their horrible repast, had eaten all the flesh on the fingers, but left the ring untouched.

"We must take care of this," said one of the officers, after the ring had been examined, and placing the article in his pocket as he spoke. "It will probably enable us to identify the body."

"Very likely. I do not know the crest myself."

"Nor I, but it will be easy to ascertain its owner."

"Oh, yes. Is there anything more?"

"I think not. I cannot see that the rats have spared anything else—all the clothing has been devoured."

"It has disappeared certainly, and the only thing that remains for us to do is to find out whether this man met with a violent death or not."

Holding up the torch, the officers now approached the body more closely.

They began at the feet, examining all the bones carefully, so as to learn whether they had been injured in any way.

Nothing of the kind at all met their view until they reached the head, or, rather, the skull.

To their horror, they found that it had been beaten or battered by some heavy instrument until its appearance even now was fearful to behold.

"Good heavens!" cried one of the officers. "Did you ever see anything so dreadful?"

"Never—never! The skull is completely smashed! What a horrible death!"

"Truly horrible. I wonder who the unfortunate man was?"

"That, I hope, we shall be able to discover ere long."

It will be found out, for you may depend a very great uproar will be made about it."

It is certain we can do no good by remaining here. Let us leave things just as they are, and lock up the cell; we shall then be able to make a proper report."

This was done.

The officers fastened up the door and placed three seals upon it, and then continued their investigations.

Although the officers knew not to what unfortunate being the skeleton belonged, the reader will doubtless have surmised that it was no other than Abel Donmull.

Such, indeed, was the horrible fate which had overtaken that bad, bold man—a fate at which all must shudder, and even some compassion must be felt for him on account of his shocking end, for had it not been for the villainous thief-taker, he would have placed Edgworth Bess in possession of her rights.

But he was not allowed to make even that tardy atonement for his many and awful crimes, and he had fallen a victim to Jonathan Wild's murderous bludgeon.

This was the instrument which had crushed the skull in the manner we have described.

After death, as the officers had correctly surmised, the rats, enticed by the odour, had made their way from Newgate Market and the sewers in prodigious numbers, and then the banquet had commenced, nor had the ravenous creatures ceased until everything eatable had been consumed.

Such was the end, then, of Abel Donmull, the usurper of his brother's title and his niece's inheritance.

The ring he had upon his finger would, of course, serve to identify the body, though it would be hard to prove that Jonathan Wild committed the atrocious deed.

The officers examined all the cells, but they found nothing else of any importance.

They retraced their steps still looking carefully about them, and finally ascended the steps leading into the open air.

But the officers had not discovered that which they hoped to find.

They did not despair, but continued their search among the heaps of ruins.

Many strange things were found, and at last they stumbled over a small tin box.

"Here was something peculiar in the look of this box. Owing to some unusual conjunction of circumstances, it had escaped all danger from the fire.

It was not even scorched.

It almost seemed as though it had been preserved to answer some particular purpose.

The officers seized it with avidity.

"At last," said one, "we seem to have found what we have been looking for!"

"Let us open the box at once, and see what it contains!"

This was done quickly, by means of the housebreakers' tools they carried.

No sooner was the lid raised than ejaculations of satisfaction burst from the lips of the officers.

The tin box was filled with gold lace of a very superior quality.

The whole quantity contained in the box, for, it was pressed down very tightly, must have been worth a large sum of money.

"Gold lace!" ejaculated the officer who had broken open the box, "the very thing!"

"Right! we will take care of this. Beyond all doubt, it is the gold lace we have been so anxiously on the look out for!"

"Do you mean the lace stolen from Mrs. Stetham's, on Holborn Hill?"

"Of course I do!"

"If it turns out so, Jonathan Wild will find himself in rather an awkward fix!"

"Very! The property was stolen, and rewards have been offered for its recovery, but all in vain, and after all the bother, here we find it among the ruins of the house!"

"It is a clear enough case! We will take this box with us and depart at once! I don't think it will answer our purpose to remain here any longer!"

"Nor I! The other men will still keep guard and prevent any person from entering; and I imagine we have discovered quite enough to enable our chief to proceed in the matter!"

"Oh, ample—ample; and what a glorious thing it is to think that Jonathan Wild has reached the end of his rope at last!"

"I hope he has done so, but don't make too sure! He is a wonderful man, and possesses remarkable talent in extricating himself from any difficulty. We may think we have him secure, but he is very likely to slip through our fingers."

"Well, we shall see! Come on, mate; we will make our chief acquainted with the results of our explorations without further delay."

"It is quite certain that Wild little expects how we are engaged to-night; if he had the faintest suspicion of it we should have had some manifestation of his presence long ere now, depend upon it!"

"You are unquestionably right there. He is watching Jack Sheppard, and so has afforded us an excellent chance of searching the ruins!"

With these words, the officers passed out into the street. They glanced up at the gloomy prison of Newgate as they passed by it, and thought of Jonathan Wild and his victim.

The grey light of early dawn was in the sky, and people were already assembled in front of the prison, waiting in patience for the hour to arrive which had been appointed for the execution.

Taking no notice of these, they directed their steps towards Bow Street.

Upon arriving here, they made a report to the inspector of their proceedings during the past night.

The ring which had been taken from the finger of the skeleton and the box of gold lace were placed in his hands.

The inspector was of opinion, after he had examined the lace, that it was the same that had been stolen some time back from the premises of Mrs. Stetham, on Holborn Hill, and for which large rewards had been offered without eliciting any information, while the police had altogether failed in their efforts to discover the perpetrators of the daring offence.

And here was the stolen property, or something very much like it, found among the ruins of Wild's house.

The case looked ominous, and the inspector, having received every detail of the affair from his subordinates, set off to the residence of the chief of police.

That functionary was not up, and he had to wait some time before he could see him.

At last, however, when the interview did take place, he was much astonished, and, in company with the inspector, set off to pay a visit to the Secretary of State.

Here a little further delay took place, and when at last the Secretary made his appearance, some hours were consumed in consultation.

They could not at first decide as to the best manner they should deal with Jonathan Wild.

From the disclosures which Steggs had made, the Secretary of State had no difficulty in understanding how the thief-taker had come into possession of the box of gold lace.

It had been stolen by some persons or other, and then brought to Wild, who had probably paid a small sum for it, and was waiting until the rewards had reached a sufficient amount to induce him to assist the owners to recover the property.

This was the usual course, and doubtless the one pursued with respect to the matter in hand, and pending the arrangement for its return the gold lace had been kept at hand on his premises.

It would not do to be too precipitate in dealing with such a man as Jonathan Wild, or the ends of justice would be defeated.

In the first place, it would be necessary to discover the persons by whom the robbery was committed, and, in order that this might be done, instructions were given that a free pardon should be offered to them on condition that they gave evidence against Wild, with regard to his share in the transaction.

All this would have to be done with great secrecy, for should the least whisper of such a thing reach Jonathan Wild's ears, he would take the alarm and get clear off.

The Inspector of Police, however, expressed his conviction that, if a free pardon was offered, he should be able to produce the guilty parties in a couple of hours.

In the event of his being successful in doing this, the persons were to be carried before a magistrate, in order that their depositions might be taken down, and a warrant was then to be issued for the apprehension of the thief-taker.

These arrangements having been made, the inspector and the Chief of the Police took their departure.

The former was as good as his word.

In less than two hours after he had sent out two officers with instructions to offer a free pardon to those persons who had been engaged in the robbery of some gold lace from the shop of Mrs. Stetham, on Holborn Hill, they returned, bringing with them a man and a woman.

The former of these gave his name as Henry Kelly—the latter as Margaret Murphy.

They admitted that they and they only had been concerned in the robbery of the gold lace.

According to instructions, they were taken before a magistrate, and their depositions written down.

These implicated Jonathan Wild to such an extent, that the magistrate, without the least hesitation, issued a warrant empowering his instant apprehension and lodgment in one of his Majesty's gaols.

Armed with this warrant, the inspector withdrew, and thought over the best plan of action for him.

From inquiry, he learned that Jonathan Wild had left the prison of Newgate on his way to Tyburn.

The inspector then took such measures as he imagined were best calculated to secure his apprehension.

What a surprise there was in store for the great thief-taker.

Who would have thought that a warrant should actually be in existence against him?

It seems improbable to a degree.

And yet it was so; and it seemed that, after putting up with voluntary imprisonment, he was now destined to have to submit to an involuntary one.

But we will leave events to take their course.

We will only say that the aspect of affairs now is most peculiar, and the incidents which followed this singular conjunction of events are of a far more singular and exciting character than any which we have yet had an opportunity of placing before our reader.

It will now be our duty to return to the prison of Newgate, and relate what events followed those which we last related as occurring on the Sunday night.

That night passed over without the occurrence of any particular incident.

Jack Sheppard lay all the time upon the miserable bed, while Jonathan Wild still sat in the chair at the table half asleep, and little thinking in what way his enemies were engaged.

CHAPTER CCCCXXXV.

MONDAY MORNING ARRIVES, AND EVERY PREPARATION IS MADE FOR JACK SHEPPARD'S EXECUTION.

It is Monday morning, and let us, before we go any further, take a look around us, and ascertain the exact position of all those persons whose fortunes have made up this most eventful history.

Let us see how they were one and all engaged at this particular period of time.

In the first place, then, there is Blueskin.

He is in the public-house in Smithfield Market, into which he had ventured in quest of information.

He is on the point of learning from the landlord of that public-house the particulars of some scheme by which Jack Sheppard may be benefitted.

Next comes the poor, persecuted Edgworth Bess, with her new-found and faithful friend Ned Cantle.

They are away from the city of Amsterdam.

They have taken up their abode in a little cottage on the borders of a forest, and here they were on Monday morning, wholly ignorant of what was taking place in London.

Their anticipations of the worst never came up to the dreadful reality.

Then there is Steggs, who, having laid a plan for the destruction of his hated foe, is in comfortable enough quarters in the residence of the Secretary of State.

George Wild, too, the bad son of a bad father?

He still lay in that portion of the prison appropriated to the Governor's own use, and suffering horribly from the various hurts he had received, and not very well able to help himself.

Mr. Noakes, the Governor, too, must not be forgotten.

At the earliest dawn he had risen from his bed, for Monday was to be a happy day for him, and he felt that he could not have too much of it.

We come at last to Jack Sheppard.

To have described the feelings of any of the other characters we have mentioned would have been easy.

To describe Jack Sheppard's we feel would be impossible.

We could not even give the barest and most meagre outline of the thoughts that thronged through his throbbing and fevered brain.

As minute after minute passed away, the conviction pressed still more strongly upon his mind that it was the last night he should ever pass on earth.

On the morrow he should take his last look of the sun, and the earth, and all existence.

On the morrow he should bid farewell to life.

He had seen Edgworth Bess for the last time.

Never again would he experience the pleasure of gazing into her lovely countenance.

She had gone—where he knew not; but he should see her no more.

Mournful words!

His heart seemed as though it would break, for, upon further thought, he felt himself compelled to adopt Jonathan's account of the affair.

Blueskin and Ned Cantle had deserted him.

Why he knew not, but they had deserted him; and where they had gone or where they were at that moment he had not the remotest idea.

They were in safety, no doubt; but he was a prisoner—a prisoner condemned to death, and waiting for the moment when he should be led out to execution.

As he lay upon his miserable pallet he watched the dim streaks of day creep into the cell.

Never again was he to behold the same phenomenon, and he watched the gradual illumination of his cell with an interest that surprised himself.

The consciousness was upon him that he was watching it for the last time.

What hope had he of escape?

None—none!

No power on earth could save him.

He was doomed to die, and the time fixed for his ignominious death was close at hand.

He tossed and rolled upon his wretched bed, and would have given way to his emotions much more than he did, had not the baleful, hideous eyes of Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, been fixed upon him.

What a satisfaction it would have been to Jack if he could have known what the police officers were engaged upon at that moment!

He would have gone to death almost without a pang, had he possessed the knowledge that Jonathan Wild, his hated enemy, would speedily follow him to the same scaffold.

But though he uttered his predictions with an air of conviction that was not without producing its due effect upon Jonathan Wild, yet he had no foundation for them.

He did not think he should live to see the villain executed, though he could not help believing that the time would come when he would receive the reward which his demoniac villanies so truly merited.

His heart would have leaped with joy if he had known that a warrant was about to be issued for Wild's apprehension—that retribution would overtake him so soon.

We have said that Jack had fully rendered himself up to despair.

All hope had departed from his breast.

He neither thought he might have a chance of making his escape, nor that an attempt would be made to rescue him while being led to the scaffold.

No, he believed that he should perish; and that, too, before he was many hours older.

Brighter and brighter grew the cell.

One by one the various objects were brought into view, and, finally, fully revealed.

As for Jonathan Wild, he woke up in unusually high spirits.

This proceeded as much from the fact that the day appointed for Jack's execution had at length arrived, as that the termination of his voluntary imprisonment, which had begun to grow terribly tiresome, had come at last.

At a very early hour that morning the inmates of Newgate were astir.

The Governor was the first to rise, and he had quickly roused up all the rest.

The hatred which he felt for Jack Sheppard was his strongest feeling.

It is not to be so much wondered at, because by breaking out of the prison in the manner he had, Jack had brought him into great trouble and difficulty, and more than once he had been threatened with the deprivation of his snug little office.

Hence his dislike to Jack had a reasonable enough foundation.

The only thing was, he pushed it to rather an extreme limit.

It was about six o'clock when Jack Sheppard heard the fastening outside his cell door removed.

He raised himself on one arm, curious to see who it was about to pay him such an early visit.

To his surprise, he saw Mr. Noakes and two turnkeys.

The latter carried in some water, and Jack was bidden to perform his ablutions, and otherwise render himself respectable.

To the astonishment of all, Wild loudly called for water, and then he began to wash himself in truly a furious manner.

After working industriously for about half an hour, he succeeded in making himself, as he considered, look quite charming and fascinating.

He had removed the coating of dirt which had caked itself over his hands and face, and he had adjusted his wig and neckcloth.

Jack washed and dressed himself with scrupulous care.

What a strange feeling it was that held possession of him!

All the time he kept repeating, mentally:

"This is the last time I shall do this—I am about to die!"

When he had finished, the ordinary entered, and, in spite of the rebuffs which Jack gave him, commenced to read some prayers with great unction.

Having gone through this part of his professional duty,



[JACK SHEPPARD IS PINIONED IN THE PRESS-YARD OF NEWGATE.]

he exhorted Jack to confess, but he expended his rhetoric in vain.

Jack turned a deaf ear to all he said.

At last he withdrew, after having first informed Jack that nothing could save him from everlasting torments.

Jack was heartily glad when he had taken his departure, but he was not allowed to remain undisturbed.

Breakfast was next brought in.

It was a tempting, substantial meal, but Jack felt no appetite.

Still, in order to spare himself the taunts of Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes, Jack forced the food down his throat and pretended to enjoy it.

As for the thief-taker, he ate voraciously.

Never had he felt in such good humour with himself and all the world.

Never had he felt so secure and triumphant.

No. 91.—BLUESKIN.

And yet at that moment he stood as it were upon a mine which threatened every moment to explode.

Oh, what a relief it was to Jack when breakfast was over, and yet he had no desire for time to fly, since each instant brought him nearer and nearer to his frightful doom.

After breakfast he was allowed a little peace, but not much, for Jonathan Wild still kept in the cell.

He had made a resolution to do so, and he kept it to the letter.

Jack felt that he could not look in the face of his deadly enemy while thus distorted with triumph, and retain at the same time his own calmness, so he studiously kept his eyes turned in another direction.

Two more hours passed, and then the cell door was again thrown open.

Jonathan Wild immediately rose to his feet and perpetrated a series of profound bows.

Jack, wondering who it could be, looked up and saw that two sheriffs, dressed off in their ridiculous attire, had just entered.

The Governor was behind, the very picture of deference and servility.

Behind him were the turnkeys.

"Good morning, gentlemen!" said Wild, failing horribly in his attempt to make himself agreeable. "Good morning, gentlemen! I am really pleased to meet you upon the present occasion! I don't like to speak of myself, gentlemen, but you see the plan I have adopted, though contrary to all regulations, has fully answered its purpose."

"It has, Mr. Wild—it has!" replied one of the sheriffs, puffing violently, for the least exercise distressed him; "and I beg to thank you for having taken so much trouble."

"It was a pleasure, my dear Mr. Sheriff—a real pleasure!" answered Wild, hypocritically. "Anything I can do that is of benefit to the public at large is a source of great pleasure to me."

"Your conduct for years past is quite sufficient to prove that!" puffed the sheriff. "Is it not, Brother Potter?" he added, turning to his colleague.

"In that, as in everything else, I perfectly agree with you, my dear sir!" said the under-sheriff, who was one of those men who never venture to have an opinion of their own about anything.

The other sheriff stroked the sides of his waistcoat, probably to assist the digestion of the heavy meal he had just taken, and then he said:

"Mr. Wild, your conduct in this matter is beyond all praise. You have done what Newgate itself could not do—you have kept this rascal in safe custody. I will take care that this great and important service does not go unrewarded. I shall mention it at the first fitting opportunity."

To have seen how Wild grinned and bowed while the sheriff thus spoke was really something worth looking at, only his sycophancy was disgusting.

"Oh, Mr. Sheriff," he said, pretending to be quite overcome, "however can I thank you for what you have just said? I cannot—I really cannot! I feel that I cannot speak after you! What I have done was merely in order that the public at large might be benefited, and the words you have just spoken are a far greater reward than I ever looked for!"

The fat, pompous sheriff was amazingly flattered by this speech, and he smiled upon Wild in the most affable manner conceivable, as he headed:

"I will take care, Mr. Wild, that you receive a more substantial reward for your services than mere words!"

"Oh, sir, you are too good!"

"Not at all—not at all! You are a very worthy man, Mr. Wild!"

"And you are an egregious ass!" said Jack Sheppard, addressing the sheriff.

Jack was so disgusted with the scene which was going forward that he could not restrain himself, though, of course, had he been wise he would have held his tongue.

An ominous silence followed his words, which were enunciated with great fervency.

"You are an egregious ass!" he repeated; "or you would not allow yourself to be duped in such a barefaced manner by that unparalleled villain."

Jonathan held up his hands in affected dismay.

The sheriff opened his eyes very wide, and puffed out his cheeks to such an extent that they seemed in imminent danger of bursting.

Speech was denied him, but he glared fearfully at Jack, who returned the gaze with a pitying smile upon his lips.

The reader can imagine how disgusted he would be with Jonathan's behaviour.

Wild saw that the sheriff could not speak, but believing that he could both hear and understand, determined to take advantage of the situation if he could.

"Ah, Mr. Sheriff," he said, in the same fawning tones that he had previously employed, "had I given you my opinion of this unhappy young man, I could not have conveyed to you such an idea of the enormity of his depravity as he has done himself in a few words! The man

who could call a respectable sheriff of the worshipful City of London an egregious ass would be guilty of any act, no matter how atrocious!"

The sheriff, thus appealed to, took a long silk pocket-handkerchief out of his pocket and gave his eyes some furious dabs with it.

"Alas—alas!" he cried. "Not from my own feelings, but from the contemplation of so much wickedness in one so young, I weep! I weep, and cannot help it!"

"And I!" said the under-sheriff, with a hypocritical snuffle, true to his purpose of taking his cue from his colleague.

"Such tears," said Wild, "do honour to you both as men, and to the whole City of London."

The thief-taker gave a circular sweep with his arm as he spoke, to show how comprehensive he meant to be, and to give increased effect to his words.

The Ordinary of Newgate, who had just entered with an open book in his hand, and crumbs sticking round his mouth—he had stopped longer than the rest at breakfast, he was such an inordinate glutton—now joined in the strain.

He always took good care to be on the best possible terms with the sheriffs, did this ordinary, and he let slip no opportunity of fawning upon and flattering them.

In a puritanical tone of voice, he said:

"Ah, Mr. Sheriff, the state of this young man makes my heart bleed! I pray for him unceasingly, but I fear that, however good the prayers may be which are offered up for so hardened a miscreant, they must fail to produce any effect! Still, I pray for him, Mr. Sheriff—I pray for him!"

"Why," exclaimed Jack, "you are a liar as well as a humbug! You told me, when you left me a little while ago, that I should go to torment, and that you would try your best to send me there!"

"Unhappy young man!" said the ordinary. "Why not learn to speak the truth?—at least attempt it now you are so near death!"

"I do speak the truth, and you know it!" returned Jack, resolutely.

"A hardened sinner!" replied the ordinary—"a hardened sinner! Rarely has it been my lot to contemplate such wickedness!"

"It is fortunate for the credit of humanity that there are not many such examples!" said the sheriff, puffing more violently than ever.

"Ah, gentlemen!" said Wild, "I could relate to you the particulars of such deeds that that young man has committed, to my certain knowledge, that would fairly chill your blood and tie your flesh up in knots—indeed I could!"

"I don't doubt you, Mr. Wild," said the sheriff, "and there is some consolation in knowing that if ever anybody deserved to hang upon Tyburn Tree, he does."

"There is consolation in that," replied the ordinary; "he fully deserves the worst fate that could be awarded to him."

"It is enough to make anyone shudder!" said the sheriff.

"Quite!" said his companion, agitating his fat till it trembled like jelly,—“quite enough!”

"Excuse me for interrupting you, gentlemen," said Mr. Noakes, with great deference—"I really hope you will excuse me!"

"What is the matter?"

"Why, time is going on, you know. In fact, it is quite time we made our preparations and got ready to start."

"We shall be late, I fear," said the sheriff, taking a watch about the size of a turnip from his pocket.

"No, no!" said the governor; "we shall be in time, for every possible arrangement has already been made."

"Proceed, then, Mr. Governor," said the sheriff, "and let us get this unpleasant business over as soon as possible!"

CHAPTER CCCCXXXVI.

IN WHICH JACK SHEPPARD STARTS ON HIS JOURNEY TO TYBURN TREE.

JACK SHEPPARD was so thoroughly disgusted with the conversation in progress, that he refused to listen to any more of it.

The turnkeys, however, after Mr. Noakes had spoken,

came towards him and aroused him from his abstraction. "Now then!" they said, "Just follow us, will you?"

The little party which had thronged the strong chamber in which Jack was confined now formed themselves into a kind of procession.

The two sheriffs followed themselves at the head of it, and the Governor placed.

Jonathan Wild sidled up to Jack, and the turnkeys surrounded them both.

In this manner they all left the cell, and traversed the gloomy passages of the prison, until at length they emerged into what is still called the press-yard of Newgate.

It derived its name from a barbarous and inhuman punishment which was inflicted upon those prisoners who refused to plead to their indictment.

If, when the clerk of the arraigns asked them whether they were guilty or not guilty, they refused to answer either one way or the other, they were carried away from the dock to the press-yard.

Here they were laid upon the bare ground, with their arms and legs firmly secured in an extended position by means of strong cords.

Heavy weights, either of iron or stone, were placed upon their bodies, and the weight gradually increased until either death put an end to their frightful sufferings, or until the culprits consented to plead to their indictment.

In the event of the latter, the weights were one by one removed, and the prisoners taken back to the court.

This practice was continued up to the year 1722—two years before the events which we are now describing.

The yard was now used as a place where prisoners were whipped, and where they were pinioned previously to being placed in the cart, though sometimes the pinioning process was performed in the cells.

It had been arranged that Jack Sheppard should be pinioned in the press-yard, and accordingly he was led thither, attended by a numerous escort.

Upon arriving, however, he found that preparations had been made for him.

In addition to the turnkeys, a number of soldiers were present.

They were fully armed, and had received instructions to act the moment when they perceived there was a necessity for them to do so.

Jack Sheppard inhaled the not very fresh air in the press-yard of the prison with sensations of unalloyed pleasure.

At each breath he seemed to imbibe a quantity of life.

He began to feel more himself, and the change which came over him was so remarkable, that it was noticed by all present.

His eyes sparkled, and his cheeks flushed as though he was under the influence of some strong excitement.

Jonathan Wild looked vigilantly about him in order to perceive, if possible, what it was that had produced so remarkable an effect upon Jack.

But there was nothing.

At this moment the throng of persons divided, and Jack, hearing the commotion, instinctively turned his eyes in the direction of the sound.

But it was only to avert them instantly, as though they had been blasted by some horrible sight.

Jonathan Wild noticed that Jack shuddered, and he grinned with delight.

The rich treat that there was in store for him was just beginning to make itself manifest.

No doubt the reader can guess why it was that Jack turned his eyes away so suddenly, and afterwards shuddered.

He had caught sight of the hangman.

The throng had divided in order to allow him the opportunity of approaching the prisoner.

All shrank back quickly, so as to avoid the least contact with this man.

The executioner noticed it with a malicious grin, but otherwise took no notice of an occurrence which could not but have been patent to him.

Suddenly Jack started.

The hangman, with his lounging step, had reached his side, and touched him on the shoulder.

In a chuckling voice, which was most horrible to listen to, he said:

"Come, come—attend to me, please, and let us get this bit of business over as soon as possible!"

Jack shuddered again.

In spite, however, of the proximity of the hangman, he felt much better than he had done for a long time.

It was the fresh air which produced this effect upon him.

Once more did hope revive in his breast.

Once more did the word "escape" suggest itself to his mind.

The strange lethargic feeling which had weighed upon his spirits during his imprisonment to a great extent departed, and he looked about him in the hope of being able to seize upon something which would be of service to him.

Perhaps after all, he told himself, he should be able to escape, if he was only careful and cautious.

He did not feel now that strange sensation which he had for so long experienced, that he was near death.

Instead of it, he seemed to feel a conviction that he should once more triumph over his enemies.

It is hard to say from whence he derived this conviction.

There seemed little room for hope while he stood in the press-yard, surrounded by his foes, and with the executioner touching him on the shoulder.

Just when he felt the hateful touch, Jack had caught sight of a small penknife in Jonathan Wild's pocket.

Of what particular service it would be to him he knew not; yet he felt that it might be useful, and an irresistible longing came over him to take possession of it.

Jonathan's pocket was gaping open, and this was how it happened that Jack caught sight of the knife.

Quick as thought, and without being perceived by anyone, Jack picked Wild's pocket of this knife, and slipped it into his own.

With great cleverness he diverted the attention of his enemies.

When the hangman made the demand we have mentioned, Jack thrust his hands resolutely into his trousers pockets, and refused to remove them in order that he might be pinioned.

He would not have done this had it not been for the knife he had so cleverly obtained possession of.

While he held his hands in his pockets, then, he contrived to open one blade of the knife.

Should he have occasion to make use of it, it would thus come more readily to his hand.

"Come, Mr. Sheppard," said the hangman, "don't be so foolish! You will do yourself no good by resisting. Come—let me do my business without any fuss!"

Jack knew there was nothing to be gained by resistance just then, so he sullenly took his hands out of his pockets, and suffered the hangman to bind his arms behind his back.

When this ceremony was over, Jack thought he would be led straight to the courtyard, where he knew the cart would be waiting which was to take him to Tyburn.

But he was disappointed in this expectation.

At a sign from Mr. Noakes, a turnkey stepped forward.

"One moment!" he said. "We have a little ceremony to go through, though it's more a matter of form than aught else."

The little ceremony to which the turnkey alluded consisted of thoroughly searching the condemned man's pockets, in order to make sure that he had no weapon concealed about him.

This turnkey never expected to find anything in Jack's pocket, though he supposed, for form's sake, he must not omit the accustomed duty.

Unconsciously, then, he thrust his hands into Jack's pockets, in order to make sure that nothing was concealed in them.

He thrust his hand into Jack's trousers pocket, and then he uttered a yell.

"Murder!" he cried; and when he withdrew his hand, which he did more swiftly than he put it in, it was found to be dripping with blood.

The shout which was raised after this may be imagined.

Half a dozen turnkeys at once sprang forward; and while some held the prisoner, others drew the knife from his pocket.

As soon as it was held up, Jonathan Wild cried:

"What—that is my knife! How on earth did he get hold of it? I put it into my pocket after I came into the yard here!"

The knife was handed back to Wild; but how Jack had become possessed of it was an inscrutable mystery.

Of course, Jack's pockets were searched even more carefully than before; but nothing else was found.

The incident furnished plenty of food for conversation. Jack could not help being disappointed, and he feigned being even more so than he was, in order thereby to throw his enemies off their guard as much as possible, by inducing in them the belief that the knife was all-essential to some daring plan of escape which he had formed.

As soon as the turnkey talked about searching his pockets, Jack knew that discovery was inevitable, and he was immensely delighted when the officious officer cut his hand so severely.

Probably, as his arms were bound behind him, Jack would not have had an opportunity of making any use of this knife, so its loss was not a matter of such serious moment after all.

In a few minutes all was calm again.

The fat sheriff, with another tremendous exertion of strength, pulled out his enormous watch, declaring, as he did so, that they would be monstrous late if they did not make a move at once.

This was enough.

Mr. Noakes and Jonathan Wild at once bestirred themselves, and the procession took its way to the courtyard.

Here the horse and cart by which the prisoner was to be conveyed to Newgate were waiting.

Here, too, a large number of police officers and soldiers were assembled.

The preparations for the execution of Jack Sheppard had been made upon rather an extensive scale.

This was not only because he had shown himself to be such a daring offender, but in consequence of the rescue of Blueskin, even when at the fatal spot, which had taken place such a short time before.

The authorities had made up their mind that no attempt to rescue Jack Sheppard, no matter how well organised, should be successful.

Every precaution that they could think of had been taken.

Round the gallows itself a body of soldiers had been placed, who surrounded it with a triple line.

This was to keep off intruders, and to prevent anyone from cutting the gallows down again.

Then the cart in which Jack Sheppard was to sit would be closely guarded, not only by police officers, but by soldiers too, so that the mob should be quite powerless.

Although the rain fell quite fast enough to make standing out in the open air uncomfortable, yet the people had assembled in such quantities as had never before been known.

They stood patiently enough, quite heedless of the falling rain, and intent only upon catching sight of the young man who was about to be led forth to die.

Round the prison they were packed so closely that not another person could have found room to stand, and from there they extended in a dense mass to the Half-way House, in High Street, St. Giles's.

The assemblage was marvellous, and no one could recollect seeing such a large number of people collected before.

But, then, Jack Sheppard had achieved a notoriety that was truly universal.

Jack was scarcely surprised when he saw so many officers and soldiers assembled in the courtyard, for he had imagined that every pains would be taken to keep him secure.

He had prepared himself, as he thought, for the scene which he had to go through, but nevertheless, when he caught sight of the rudely-made black coffin that was placed across the cart, he felt his flesh creep and his cheeks blanch.

He was alive, and there he was looking upon the coffin which was to receive his remains.

By a great and sudden effort he shook off the uncomfortable feeling which this reflection produced.

In spite of all, hope still lived in his breast—he still believed he should have some opportunity afforded him of escaping his dreadful doom.

He fancied that he had done Blueskin a great wrong by entertaining for a moment the thought that he had abandoned him.

Ere long he felt sure he should see some manifestation of his presence.

The soldiers and police officers divided, in order to enable Jack and the hangman to reach the cart.

Some steps were placed in a convenient position, and Jack was assisted to ascend them.

The ordinary followed him.

He was, as usual, attired in full canonicals, and he held a large prayer-book open in his hand.

He seated himself by the side of Jack.

The executioner next climbed up in the front of the cart.

He seated himself upon the coffin, and took the reins and the whip in his hands.

So far, then, all was ready; and in another moment the gates leading out into the Old Bailey would have been flung open, when suddenly the discordant voice of Jonathan Wild made itself heard above all other sounds.

"A horse!" he cried. "A horse! I must have a horse! I had forgotten that. The procession must not start without me. For many a day I have sworn to follow him to the gallows, and I will keep my word! I shall be cheated if I do not see him swing!"

There was no horse for Jonathan Wild.

He had been quite overlooked.

Wild was furious; but, finding he could not achieve his object by violence, he calmed himself, and made his way to the carriage in which the sheriffs had already seated themselves, for in those days they had to accompany the criminals to Tyburn.

"Mr. Sheriff!" he said, "you admitted, a little while ago, that—thanks to my exertions—Jack Sheppard had been retained a prisoner in Newgate after thrice breaking out of it!"

The High-sheriff puffed out his cheeks as though about to say something; but, before he could speak, Wild added:

"You are now in greater danger of losing him than ever you were."

"Dear me! how is that, Mr. Wild?"

"Simply thus: no accommodation has been set aside to enable me to accompany the procession to Tyburn, and unless I go the ends of justice will probably be defeated at the last moment, as they were upon a recent occasion!"

"Oh, you must go, Mr. Wild!" said the sheriff—"of course, you must go!"

"But how? I have been entirely forgotten!"

"Get into the carriage along with me."

"Thanks, sir—many thanks! I am sorry, but I must decline the honour! It is necessary that I should be on horseback by the side of the cart, and in readiness to act at a moment's notice!"

"Very well, have a horse, then!"

"But how am I to get one, my dear sir?"

"Oh, you shall have one, never fear! It won't do to run the risk of having all our trouble for nothing. I am much obliged to you, Mr. Wild, for exhibiting so much laudable interest in the affair."

"It is for the sake of the public good alone."

"I know it, Mr. Wild—I know it! There is not the least occasion for you to remind me of it!"

"But a horse, my dear Mr. Sheriff?"

The sheriff put his head out of the window of the coach, and beckoned to Mr. Noakes.

The Governor hurried towards him.

"Have you no more horses?" he said.

"Not one!" was the reply.

"What is to be done? It won't be safe for the procession to go on without Mr. Wild!"

"What do you suggest, sir?" asked the Governor.

"I can't suggest; you must find Mr. Wild a horse from somewhere!"

"It's impossible!"

"Stop!" said Wild. "I know how it can be managed, if Mr. Sheriff has no objection!"

"How—how?"

"I will, with your permission, get into the cart. I can sit on one side of the prisoner, and the ordinary on the other!"

"Very well, Mr. Wild," said the sheriff; "if such a course is suited to you, I have no objections whatever."

"Thanks—thanks! It will suit me admirably! I will run and take my place, and the procession can start at once!"

"Do not be any longer than you can help. We shall be very late as it is!"

"Depend upon me!" said the thief-taker, who hastened off to the cart.

Of course, everyone was surprised when they saw Jonathan Wild climb up in a clumsy manner into the cart.

None could be more astonished than Jack was himself.

He could not imagine what motive Wild could have for such an extraordinary proceeding.

But when Wild came and sat down by the side of him he comprehended in a moment that his purpose was to prevent, if he could, all possible chance of his being able to make his escape.

Still, he wondered at the thief-taker's adopting such an unpleasant means of achieving the end he had in view, for a ride in the condemned cart could not but be disagreeable even to him.

But there he was.

Jack had not much time for reflection.

The busy scene that was going on around him attracted the whole of his attention.

It was strange, but even although he was being led forth, he could not help interesting himself in what was going forward.

He felt, it a relief, too, to look about him, since while doing so he was able to avoid the sinister and triumphant gaze which his persecutor fixed upon him.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD RECEIVES A COMMUNICATION FROM HIS FRIENDS, AND MAKES A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.

At a given signal, the huge folding doors which led from the courtyard into the Old Bailey were thrown slowly open.

A continuous sullen roar from the street signified that the opening of the door had been noticed.

Everybody now was on the look-out to catch sight of the prisoner.

From mouth to mouth the intelligence was communicated that the procession was about to start.

Outside those huge folding doors a troop of soldiers had been stationed in order to keep off the mob.

They found their task a difficult one, but they performed it.

At a walking pace the procession emerged.

First came the police officers to clear the way.

Then followed the soldiers.

Then more police, and then the cart.

It was upon this last object that the attention of the people was centred.

Such shouting, swearing, and fighting as there was to catch a glimpse of its occupants was surely never heard before.

But when they caught sight of Jonathan Wild a most unmistakable howl of execration followed.

The thief-taker scowled fearfully when he heard it, and ground his teeth.

The ordinary began to read the prayers, but his voice was quite inaudible among the general din.

Never before had such an assemblage of roughs been seen.

The dregs of the population were indeed there.

Jack naturally shrank a little when he saw so many faces turned towards him, and eyes fixed upon him.

Not only were the streets crowded to excess, but every building which commanded a view of the spot was literally thronged.

Every house-top, every window, was furnished with its crowd of eager gazers.

At the latter, many fashionably-dressed ladies were seated, with spy-glasses, with which they watched even the expression upon the victim's face.

It was only for a moment that Jack allowed the people to be conscious that their eager gazing distressed him.

Directly afterwards he sat there, cool, calm, and composed, with his eyes wandering busily over the huge crowd, seeking for some familiar friendly face.

But all were strange.

Still Jack's mind was busy with the thoughts of escape. That idea was prominently before his mind, and he kept perpetually on the watch, so as to be ready to avail himself in an instant of any chance that offered itself.

When the opportunity came he determined not to be taken unawares.

At a very slow walk indeed the cart went up the Old Bailey towards Snow Hill.

The rear of the procession consisted of soldiers, police officers, the Governor of Newgate, and the carriages containing the sheriffs.

It was easy to see that Jack Sheppard had the popular sympathy on his side.

No offensive demonstrations were made towards him, as there were towards many prisoners when in the fatal cart.

But at Jonathan Wild and the hangman the bitterest taunts were levelled, and occasionally missiles thrown.

As for the thief-taker, he felt he was in a position to despise the public wrath, so, folding his arms, he contented himself with every now and then uttering an angry snarl whenever any more than usually unpleasant cry saluted his ear, or when he was struck by any unsavoury missile.

Down Snow Hill the procession went a little faster, but still it was only at a walk.

In crossing Fleet Ditch—which lay in the valley where Farringdon Street now is—a further delay took place.

After crossing the bridge, came the steep ascent of Holborn Hill, which, in those days, was by far more precipitous than it is now.

Up this they toiled more slowly than ever, for not only was it very difficult for the horses to ascend the hill, but the people here seemed to be more densely packed.

Close to the steps leading up into the graveyard of St. Andrew's Church, they came to a dead stop.

There was generally a halt about this spot, and it was frequently a custom for the friends of prisoners to be here and bid them a last farewell.

Jack knew this, and so he cast a despairing glance around, for he scarcely dared to hope that he should see anyone there who would bid farewell to him.

A keen glance at the faces of those who were assembled near the steps assured him that there was no one there he knew.

To his surprise, however, a young and good-looking girl pushed her way through the crowd—or rather the crowd gave way and allowed her a passage, for she kept saying:

"Stand aside, good people—stand aside! Let me bid him a last good-bye!"

Without exception, the people made way for her, and in another moment she stood beside the cart.

But Jack was astonished that the girl should desire to say farewell to him, for, after a careful inspection of her features, he came to the conclusion that he had never seen her in his life before.

In her hand this girl carried a bouquet of very pretty flowers, and round the stems a piece of white paper had been tied.

As soon as she was at the side of the cart, she said, in tones of great sweetness:

"Good-bye, Jack—good-bye! Say good-bye to me, and take these flowers—take them in remembrance of me, and carry them to the last! Take them—take them!"

Now, Jack Sheppard was never very dull of comprehension, and on the present occasion danger seemed to have sharpened his perceptions.

This young girl, who spoke in such a pleading tone of voice, and who proffered the flowers with so engaging an air, was, he felt certain, an utter stranger to him.

It was not from affection that she offered him the flowers, nor because she wished him to remember her.

Jack concluded at once that the nosegay contained a message of some description or other from his friends.

His arms were secured by his elbows being bound behind his back, which allowed him the partial use of his hands, so he held out his right hand, and the girl gave him the bouquet, taking care at the same time to clasp his fingers round it.

Jack murmured some words of farewell and thanks, and then the cart was set in motion again.

The young girl then became lost in the vast living mass.

The whole incident had occurred with so much rapidity,

and occupied so little time, that Jack could hardly believe it was all real.

Yet there was the bunch of flowers in his hand.

There was a mystery connected with them, he felt certain, and it would be necessary to find out what that mystery was, without, at the same time, acquainting Jonathan Wild with it.

But how was this to be done?

How was he to elude the lynx-like gaze which the thief-taker incessantly kept upon him?

If there was anything to be seen, Jonathan would catch sight of it at the same moment as himself.

This was a dilemma, and it might produce serious occurrences.

It might be important to the schemes which his friends had formed that he should immediately acquaint himself with the message which had been sent.

But he could see no means of doing so.

He lifted the nosegay as close to his face as he could, and pretended to smell it.

He fancied there might be something hidden among the flowers, but, although his gaze was keen, he could see nothing.

He let the nosegay fall into his lap again, and took hold of it—listlessly, it appeared—with both hands.

His object was to feel whether the bunch of flowers contained anything.

In doing this, he, of course, removed his fingers from the stems, round which the young girl had been so careful to clasp them.

This circumstance had not escaped Jack's observation.

He thought that very likely the mystery might lie here, and therefore, although he pretended to be so indifferent, yet he was extremely cautious.

Directly he moved his right hand, he saw that there was writing on the paper which was tied round the stems of the flowers.

The very moment he perceived this—before he had time to see what the writing was—he closed his hand over it, and raised the nosegay once more to his face.

Wild had perceived nothing extraordinary in all this.

He had seen a nosegay given to the condemned man many a time—it was, in fact, quite a usual thing, so he thought nothing of Jack receiving one.

In a cooler moment he might perhaps have had his suspicions aroused, but the prospect of his long-looked-for but now rapidly-approaching triumph blinded him to little things which at another time would have attracted his attention.

Slowly the procession continued on its way to Tyburn, but it went too fast for Jack, who was impatient to the last degree to know what the writing consisted of.

But he seemed as far off being able to ascertain as ever, for Wild kept the keenest look-out upon him, and did not allow the least movement to pass unperceived.

Jack felt tolerably certain that if Jonathan Wild read what was written, the plans which his friends had formed would be in imminent danger of being defeated.

Holborn Hill was ascended—Holborn Bars were passed—Lincoln's Inn was close at hand—and yet up to now Jack had not been able to catch even a glimpse of the writing, so frightened was he that it would be seen by Jonathan Wild.

Probably he would have gone all the way to Tyburn in the same state of ignorance, had not chance favoured him in a very remarkable manner.

From the time of their starting, up to the present moment, Jonathan Wild had been saluted by the mob with the most dreadful hisses and yells.

The thief-taker bore them all with stoical indifference.

It was only when he was struck by some missile that he permitted his exasperation to be visible.

Comparatively speaking, very few articles were thrown.

Sometimes a perfect hurricane of miscellaneous articles would fly about the criminal's head—that is, if he happened to be unpopular, or if his crimes had been of so atrocious a character as to call for the general indignation.

On such occasions, bricks, stones, and everything that could be thrown, were hurled at the offender's head.

Sometimes the criminal, by the time he reached Tyburn would be almost stoned to death.

But Jack Sheppard was a public favourite, and it was

owing to his presence in the cart that Jonathan escaped so lightly.

The people were afraid of hitting the wrong person.

To this, and this alone, did Jonathan Wild owe his safety.

But just when they were opposite Great Turnstile—which, as all London readers will know very well, leads out of Holborn into Lincoln's Inn Fields—an incident occurred which enabled Jack to make himself acquainted with the words which were written on the piece of paper.

Just opposite Great Turnstile a man was standing who had a deep and undying grudge against Jonathan Wild, and no wonder, for the thief-taker had caused him to stand several hours in the pillory, and to lose both his ears.

This man had an idea that Wild would form a part of the procession, and accordingly had provided himself with a missile which he intended to hurl at him with full force.

It was a mean kind of revenge, of course, but the man thought he should be able to indulge in this bit of vengeance without Jonathan knowing from whose hands the missile had come.

The nice little article with which he had provided himself was a dead dog, which he had taken that morning out of the river Thames.

The dog had been many days in the water, and was in an advanced state of decomposition—indeed, it was a wonder how it held together at all.

This man had privately informed those who stood near him that he intended to favour Jonathan Wild with a taste of it, and as they highly approved of the notion, they did all they could to give the man a fair opportunity of throwing the dead dog at the thief-taker.

All bid him take good aim, but the man had no fear on that score—his whole soul was in what he was about to do.

When he saw that the thief-taker was sitting in the cart with his face turned towards him, his task became all the easier.

When Wild was just opposite to him, and only a few feet off, this man raised the dead dog, and threw it with all his strength.

His aim was marvellously accurate.

Crash it came, full in Wild's face, striking him with such force that the dogs quashed like a rotten egg.

A perfect yell of delight came from the bystanders when they saw how well the man had carried out his intention.

It was a wonder that the blow did not throw Wild over the side of the cart, but, by a miracle almost, he preserved his balance.

This was the opportunity which Jack seized to make himself acquainted with the writing.

While everybody's attention was directed to Wild, and while that individual was busily occupied in looking after himself, Jack moved his hand, and read as follows:

"Escape if you can! If you can put trust in love and hope!"

That was all.

But those few simple words made an immense difference to Jack Sheppard.

He was convinced his friends had not abandoned him, for he had recognised the handwriting at a glance.

It was Blueskin's.

How the words had imprinted themselves in his mind!

"Escape if you can!"

That was the first thing that he was to do.

He must help himself.

This pleased Jack better than having to trust to somebody else.

The epistle was laconic, but there could be no doubt about what was meant.

"Escape if you can!"

Jack resolved to try.

He looked about him.

Everywhere people by thousands and thousands.

That cart in the midst of the immense concourse of people looked like some tiny bark out on the ocean, and the heads of the people undulated in a manner not unlike the waves of the sea.

How was he to escape?

Alas! it seemed impossible.

By this time Wild had cleared himself of the putrid mass by which he had been covered, and he occupied him-

self with uttering the most diabolical curses that can possibly be imagined.

Jonathan Wild excelled most people at that sort of thing.

It was truly awful to hear him.

Although he had, to a certain extent, cleared himself, yet he was in a dreadful condition.

Jack turned his eyes away from him.

There was certainly no escape in that quarter.

The cart still moved slowly on, and now they were nearly opposite Little Turnstile, also leading, though in a circuitous manner, into Lincoln's Inn Fields.

This place is now tolerably well known, for Weston's Music Hall stands here.

The passage leading into Lincoln's Inn Fields is a very narrow one, and is only used for foot passengers, though at the present moment some improvements are going on in the locality.

It is, however, a narrow passage, down which a horse could not possibly make his way, except at a walk, for it is tortuous as well as narrow.

Jack Sheppard knew London well—very few better.

Another moment would bring him opposite Little Turnstile.

If he could only get down this passage, the officers and police, who were mounted, would not be able to follow him, and there was just a chance that, aided by the crowd, he might make his escape.

It was a desperate scheme, but he immediately made up his mind to try it, for his position was so desperate that he could not possibly make it any worse.

If he did not succeed he should still be able to fall back upon the aid which Blueskin would be able to afford him.

By the time he had made this reflection the cart arrived opposite to Little Turnstile.

The critical moment had arrived.

Uttering a loud scream, which had the effect of completely paralysing everyone—Jonathan Wild included—Jack Sheppard sprang to his feet in the cart.

Then, before any idea could be formed of his intention, or before anyone could recover from the state of confusion into which they had been thrown, Jack Sheppard exclaimed:

"I am innocent, friends all! Help! oh, help me to escape!"

CHAPTER CCCXXXVIII.

JACK SHEPPARD IS RECAPTURED IN LITTLE TURNSTILE, AND REFUSES TO PARTAKE OF THE BOWL OF PUNCH AT THE HALF-WAY HOUSE IN HIGH STREET, ST. GILES'S.

ALMOST before the words had left his lips, and before Jonathan Wild could stretch out his hand to prevent him, Jack Sheppard flung himself headlong from the cart into the road.

The uproar that ensued baffles all description.

Jack had calculated his distance well, and when he sprang from the cart he managed to fall between the wheels and the horses of those officers who were riding by the side of it.

He reached the ground awkwardly, for he could not make use of his hands to save himself.

He was bruised and half stunned, but nevertheless the recollection that his life and liberty depended upon his exertions during the next few moments rose paramount above everything.

How he did it he never could tell, for he was not in full possession of his senses, but he managed in some mysterious manner to roll under the horses and reach the crowd.

Those who stood foremost saw him.

They had witnessed his sudden act, and comprehended all.

A dozen hands were stretched out towards him, and in the space of about a second he was raised to his feet.

A lane was opened for him by the people dividing right and left.

Jack saw the way lay open before him, and he dashed forward with the speed of a hunted hare.

But as he fled he heard above the thousand and one voices that reached his ears from every side the yelling, screaming tones of Jonathan Wild's voice.

"Ten thousand curses!" he heard him say—"fly, all

of you! After him, or he will escape! Shoot him! Kill him! Smash him! But do not let him escape!"

Uttering these words, Jonathan Wild jumped out of the cart in quite as furious a manner as Jack had done.

But he alighted on his feet.

By this time it became generally known that something extraordinary had occurred.

The procession came to a complete standstill.

The officers hastily dismounted, and attempted to reach the passage.

But the living lane through which Jack had passed had closed up, and the mass of people placed themselves before the police officers and obstructed their further progress.

Jonathan Wild behaved like a madman.

Addressing the soldiers, he said:

"Cut a path through them! Hew a path and let us go by. He must not escape!"

The soldiers hesitated for about a moment, and then obeyed Wild's orders.

It was only natural that the people should give way before the horses and flashing blades of the soldiers.

However well disposed they might be towards Jack Sheppard, their feelings did not carry them so far as to make them willing to be slain in his defence.

Accordingly, they gave way before the soldiers, who reached the entrance to the narrow passage without having to shed a single drop of blood.

And now let us return to Jack Sheppard.

When he reached the narrow passage, he made sure he was safe, and that he had nothing to do but to run for his life.

But he found himself mistaken.

Away he ran down the passage, making better use of his legs than he had ever done in his life before; but ere he had gone half a dozen yards, a man, who was coming in the opposite direction at as rapid a pace as his own, ran with full force against him.

They met at a corner, so that the one could not see the other in time to avoid a collision.

The passage was so narrow that there was only just room for two to pass.

This chance meeting was a most disastrous thing for Jack.

Such was the force with which they struck each other that both bounded back several paces.

Jack being deprived of the full use of his hands and arms, could not preserve his balance, or save himself while falling.

The consequence was that he fell backwards and struck his head with terrific force against the door-step of a house.

He became instantly insensible.

The man who had unwittingly caused this disaster had fared little better.

He lay on his back looking up to the sky with his intellects in a very confused condition indeed.

Jack's insensibility only lasted a moment.

Perfectly bewildered, and scarcely knowing what had happened, Jack struggled to his feet again.

But he was too late.

The chance was lost.

A trifling extraordinary accident had decided his fate.

The man who was running had come out of a house in Gate Street, and, hearing that the procession was passing by, had run off at full speed in the hope of being able to catch a glimpse of the notorious Jack Sheppard while on his way to execution.

Then occurred the accident we have described.

By the time Jack rose staggering to his feet and unable to see distinctly about him, the soldiers had cleared a path to the mouth of the passage, down which those officers who were on foot could now pass without hindrance.

Headed by Jonathan Wild, they dashed down it.

The next instant they caught sight of Jack Sheppard.

To seize him and hold him in a grasp of iron took Wild but a moment.

He was quickly surrounded by the officers.

At this unhopd-for success Jonathan Wild's joy was unbounded.

In triumph he led the way back to the cart.

He would not release the hold he had taken of Jack, but dragged him along with him.

The police officers brought up the rear.

The soldiers were on guard at the mouth of the passage and when they saw Wild make his appearance with his capture, they formed into a double rank, thus enabling them to reach the cart again without being in any way molested by the mob.

Jack was too badly hurt to be capable of making any resistance.

The blow upon his head was a very severe one, and he seemed to feel the effects of it now even more than he did at first.

In what may be called an unconscious state he was dragged along by Jonathan Wild.

By the aid of many hands he was lifted into the cart again and placed in his former seat.

Jonathan clambered up and sat down beside him as before.

If we were to say that three minutes had elapsed from the time when Jack sprang out of the cart to the time when he was brought back and placed in it, we should exceed the mark.

All that we just related certainly occurred in the incredibly short space of about two minutes and a half, and many never knew what had occurred.

Even the sheriffs in the rear did not know but what the stoppage was one of an ordinary character, for they had been delayed quite as long several times since the commencement of the journey.

Not until afterwards did they learn the astounding intelligence that Jack Sheppard had actually jumped out of the cart and succeeded in running more than half-way down Little Turnstile.

No sooner was he quite sure that Jack Sheppard was really safe in the cart again, than Jonathan Wild, with great presence of mind, gave orders for the procession to continue on its way again.

But he kept a sharper look-out than ever.

He blamed himself for being so much off his guard before as to allow Jack to carry out such an intention, for the thief-taker could not conceal from himself the conviction that, but for the chance accident which had occurred, Jack would probably have got clear off, and he would have been defeated at the moment when he believed success to be most certain.

Upon taking his seat, almost the first thing which Wild noticed was the bunch of flowers which had been given to Jack.

It lay on the bottom of the cart where Jack had dropped it.

Under the present circumstances, the thief-taker was disposed to look upon everything with a suspicious eye, and now he stooped and picked up the nosegay, at the same time blaming himself for the want of caution he had previously displayed.

Of course, when he picked up the bouquet, the first thing he noticed was the writing on the paper.

Jonathan Wild read the words with a savage scowl.

"Escape if you can!" he muttered. "He soon acted upon the hint. He is a brave fellow! It is a thousand pities that he should come to such an end. But it is his own fault. His fate was of his own choosing. He has no one but himself to blame. But if I had had such a spirit to act with me and assist me in my plans, instead of being against me, and continually thwarting my dearest schemes, how much should I not by this time have accomplished! Bah! Let me not think of it! I must take things as they are! He has chosen his own course, and he must pay the penalty due to his folly. Still, he is a brave fellow—a brave fellow! I wish he had been with me, and then he would never have come to this!"

Thus the reader will see that Jack's greatest enemy could not do otherwise than acknowledge his boldness.

Jonathan said he pitied him, but if he did so, it was from interested motives.

Even had Jack joined him in his schemes—but such a thing was impossible—but still, if he had, what would have been Jack's ultimate reward?

Jonathan would have made use of him as his tool until he could have made use of him no longer, and then he would have handed him over to his fate without compunction—simply because he knew too much, and had ceased to be actively useful to him.

Jack was wise and bold.

If he had not possessed both those qualities in a very extraordinary degree, he would not have furnished so

much material for the chronicler of actual facts as he has done.

When Jonathan Wild had read all the words written upon the piece of paper, he tossed the nosegay carelessly and contemptuously aside.

Like everything else, when he had done with it, and reaped all the benefit he possibly could, he despised it.

"I shall have more trouble yet, it seems!" he added, to himself. "I must be wary, for if I understand that message rightly, some rescue is in contemplation. Let them try it! They will see then how signally they will fail, and that will afford me matter for satisfaction! They will fail—ha, ha!—fail utterly and completely!"

While these thoughts were passing in rapid succession through the thief-taker's brain, the procession continued its slow, wearisome progress.

Holborn was passed, and St. Giles's was reached.

From time immemorial, all death processions, while on their way to Tyburn, halted before a public-house in High Street, St. Giles's, which public-house was popularly supposed to be half-way between Newgate and the place of execution.

They were rapidly nearing this public-house, near which the people had collected in incredible quantities.

In front of this public-house the procession always stayed for a few moments, in order that the horses might be supplied with water, while those who wished it could have such refreshment as the inn afforded.

Fain would Wild have dispensed with the halt upon the present occasion.

But he was powerless to do this.

Englishmen do not allow a custom to be disregarded very easily.

To all such things they cling with a pertinacity that would be laudable were the cause better.

In obedience then, to this custom, the procession stopped before the inn.

Jonathan Wild could not disguise his alarm.

Here he fancied a rescue would most certainly be attempted.

He doubted even that the soldiers and the officers would be able to cope with so vast a multitude.

As for Jack Sheppard himself, about whom the thief-taker felt so anxious, he sat like one half dead.

By degrees, however, he recovered his consciousness, and by the time the procession halted before the inn he thoroughly comprehended, not only all that had taken place, but all that was then occurring around him.

A dull, heavy feeling was still in his head, and the pain where his head had come in contact with the stone was most excruciating; otherwise, however, he was but little the worse for his adventure.

When he knew where he was, and saw how many people were assembled, he thought, like Jonathan Wild, that a rescue would be attempted, for he could not but be aware of the favourable opportunity for the carrying out of such a scheme the pause in front of the inn afforded.

Eagerly and restlessly his eyes wandered over the immense throng, but he was unable to perceive anything that gave him room to hope.

Jonathan watched his every movement.

He noticed the look of dejection and disappointment which gradually settled upon Jack's countenance, and breathed more freely.

He began to think his apprehensions were unfounded.

But he still kept on his guard.

The landlord of the inn now approached the cart.

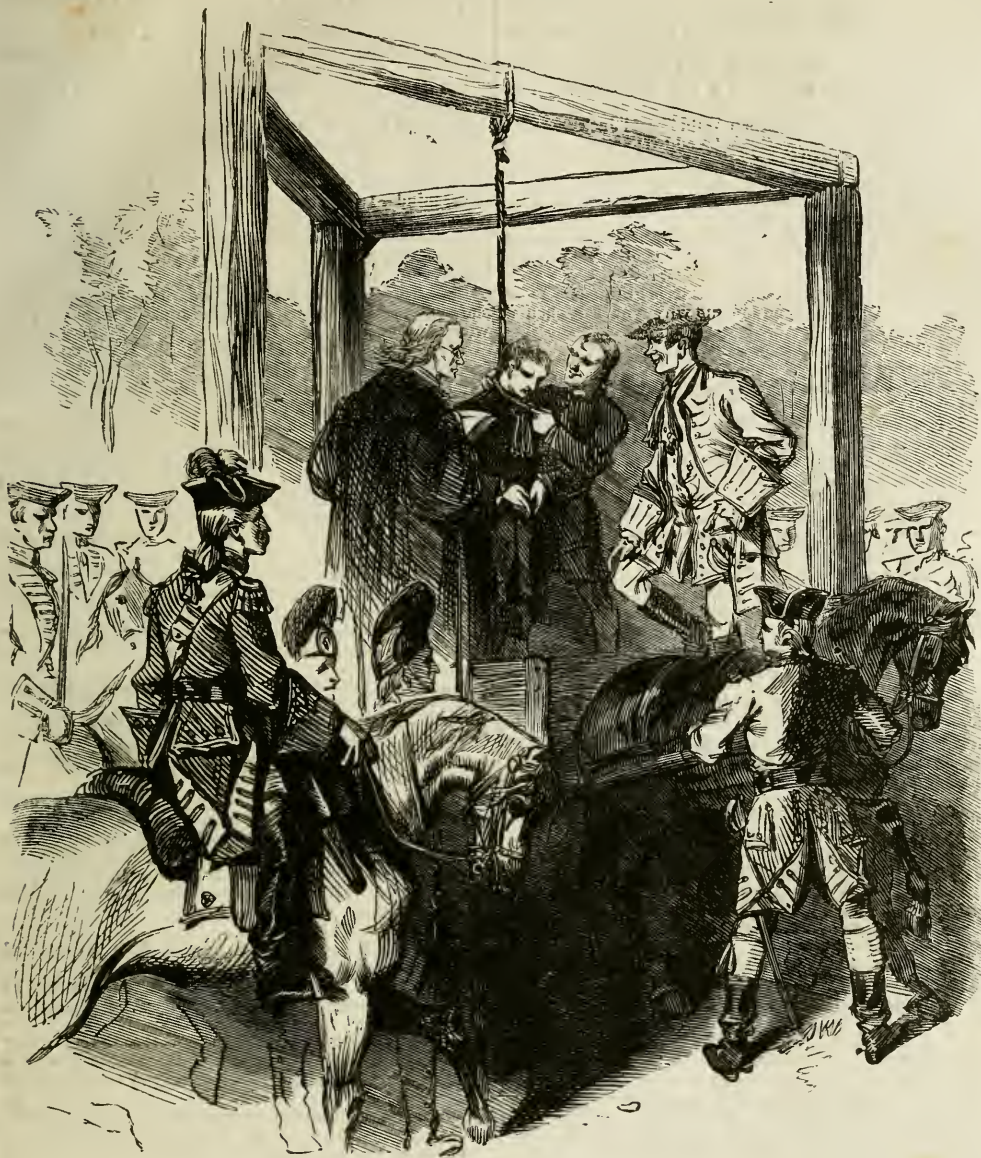
He carried in his hands a huge china bowl containing hot punch, the steam from which was plainly visible in the moist atmosphere.

For as long as it had been a custom for the procession to halt there, so long had it been a custom for the landlord of the inn to present a bowl of hot punch to the criminal condemned to die.

Sometimes the poor victim was too overcome by the thoughts of his approaching fate to partake of the smoking beverage.

It more often happened, though, that the bowl of punch was drained to the last dregs, and the criminal taken to Tyburn and executed while in a state of bestial and disgraceful intoxication.

Happily all such abuses are abolished now, but there is still room for great improvement to be made.



[THE EXECUTION OF JACK SHEPPARD AT TYBURN.]

The landlord approached, then, with the huge bowl of steaming punch.

He held it aloft with both hands.

"Drink, Jack Sheppard!" he cried—"drink, and drink deeply, for you are welcome!"

Jack's heart rose against the liquor, but nevertheless he reached out his hands as well as his bonds would permit, and took hold of the bowl.

He did so, because he thought perhaps there was an intention of rescuing him, and in the event of such a thing it would be highly advisable to gain as much time as he could.

He raised the bowl to his lips.

A loud clapping of hands followed.

Angrily he glared about him.

His eyes fell upon the police officers and the soldiers, all well armed, who formed a barrier round the cart—a

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barrier more formidable and insurmountable than the thickest stone wall—and his heart failed him.

He felt a conviction that any attempt at rescue would only result in utter failure.

An unorganised force would stand not the ghost of a chance against a well-organised one.

The former might have the advantage of numbers, but skill and discipline would more than counterbalance it.

Jack felt there was no hope, and with a sensation of utter loathing he turned away from the bowl, which had almost touched his lips.

"Won't you drink, Jack?" asked the landlord, who hesitated to take back the bowl.

Jack shook his head and made an impatient gesture.

"Why not?"

"He is afraid!" said Wild, with a chuckle.

"Afraid of what?" asked Jack Sheppard, turning towards his foe with an angry sparkle in his eye.

He had not spoken to Wild since the starting of the procession.

"You are white-livered—you have no pluck!" replied the thief-taker, with a sneer—"if you had, you would do as others do!"

"You know better, Jonathan Wild!" said Jack

Then turning to the landlord, he added:

"Here, take the bowl, and grant me the last favour I shall ever ask of you!"

"What is it?" asked the landlord, as he complied with his first request.

"It is, that you keep that bowl and its contents just as they are, and give them to the next person who comes after me!"

"It is a strange request, Jack, but it is granted! Your will is law! But won't you tell me why you ask such a thing?"

"Yes!"

"Then why is it?"

"Because I know who the next person will be!"

"Indeed!"

"It is a fact!"

"And who will it be?"

"It is a secret, but I will tell you!"

"Who—who is it?"

"Jonathan Wild!"

"J—J—Jon—Jonathan Wild?"

"Yes. It seems strange, perhaps, but you will find my words are quite true! The next person who will pass by this place, sitting where I now sit, and condemned to be executed at Tyburn, as I am, will be Jonathan Wild! I repeat it. Keep the punch for him! It will be Jonathan Wild!"

CHAPTER CCCCXXXIX.

THE PROCESSION COMES IN SIGHT OF TYBURN TREE, AND JACK SHEPPARD'S HEART IS FILLED WITH DESPAIR.

JACK SHEPPARD spoke these words in a loud and rather excited tone of voice, and when he had finished he looked round to see what notice would be taken by his persecutor.

Jonathan Wild strove hard to be calm.

But the effort was futile.

His hideous physiognomy assumed a yellow, wax-like tint, and his eyes gleamed ferociously.

It was easy enough for anyone to see how hard he was trying to keep down his passion.

Jack's words touched him more nearly than anyone would have believed possible, for, try as he would, Jonathan could not banish from his mind the recollection of the prophecy to which the old woman on the bridge had given utterance with so much wild and impressive vehemence.

Part of her prediction had already been fulfilled, and why should not the remainder?

Jonathan Wild was exceedingly superstitious.

Many a time, as the reader of these pages will remember, had he exhibited signs of this feebleness of mind.

Superstition is just the quality one would expect to see developed to rather a large extent in the mind of such a man as Jonathan Wild.

The idle predictions to which Jack Sheppard had from time to time given utterance had made a deeper impression on his foe than ever he had imagined.

Jack saw that this was a weak point of the thief-taker's, and, as a matter of course, he availed himself of it to the utmost.

It may be, after all, that the true solution of Wild's credulity in this matter was no other than the conviction pressing on his mind that he had committed deeds of the most awful character, and that he fully deserved to receive for them the punishment of death.

In all probability, the thought often occurred to him that he would terminate all his villainies upon the scaffold. Perhaps the dread of such an awful though well-merited fate hung continually over him like a shadow, and when anyone gave bold and decided utterance to that which he feared most, the effect which we have described was produced.

The voice and gestures of Jack Sheppard when he gave the bowl back to the landlord, though excited, were

at the same time solemn, and Jonathan felt his flesh crawl, and his blood turn chill in his veins.

He could tell, too, that the life-current faded out of his cheeks, but he could not control this manifestation of emotion.

But he experienced an intense desire to conceal his feelings from all around him.

He could think of nothing better than to laugh it off.

"Ha, ha!" he said, but so unmirthfully that the landlord staggered back and upset some of the boiling punch. "Ha, ha! Jack, don't you think it a good joke? Ah, well, never mind—I forgive you! I don't want to triumph over a fallen foe! Of course you want revenge, and that is the only revenge you can take! It's mean and paltry of you, Jack—but never mind! I forgive you—ha, ha! It's a good joke! Ha, ha!"

Nervously, and with a strange jerking manner, which showed how ill at ease he was, Jonathan spoke these words.

"It's all true," said Jack—"I feel it! I am sure all I have said will come true!"

"D—n you, then, for a lying hound!" said the thief-taker, unable any longer to control himself.

He struck Jack a couple of heavy blows in the face with his clenched fists as he spoke.

"Take that!" he cried savagely. "Take that!"

Jack's hands were tied behind his back, and so he could not defend himself in the least degree.

Jonathan's blows came with full force.

The first staggered him, and the second sent him sprawling at the bottom of the cart.

All that we have described was only imperfectly seen and understood by the vast multitude, whose view was obstructed by the mounted police-officers and soldiers.

Still they could tell that something in the shape of a conflict was going on in the cart, and loud shouts and confusion ensued.

Jonathan Wild's passion was over the moment he saw Jack fall.

He knew full well that what he had done was wholly indefensible.

He assisted to raise Jack to his feet, and re-seated him in the cart.

"Drive on!" he cried. "Why are we staying here such an internal time? Drive on, I tell you!"

There seemed no one in command, or if there was they did not object to Wild's order, for the soldiers and police-officers in advance at once set their horses in motion.

Once again, then, did the procession resume its oft-interrupted course.

The cart was set in motion.

Stunned and bewildered as he was, Jack yet retained sufficient of his senses to look about him.

All hope of a rescue had not abandoned him, and he felt sure a more favourable opportunity than the present would not occur.

No movement, however, to indicate that they had any such intention was made by any of the mob, and, with a bursting heart, Jack looked down at the bottom of the cart.

The immense multitude swayed about in all directions, uttering strange cries, but that was all.

On went the procession at the same snail's pace as before.

Noon was very close at hand, but there were no signs of it in the sky.

The sun had not yet made his appearance, nor did there seem any likelihood of his doing so.

A leaden-coloured cloud covered the whole face of the heavens, from which descended that fine mizzling kind of rain popularly known as "a Scotchman's mist, that will wet an Englishman through to the skin."

It made everything seem very cheerless and miserable.

A steep hill led from the half-way house up to St. Giles's Church, past which the road went.

Up this the cart went at a pace that was tedious in the extreme.

At length the corner of the Oxford Road was gained.

Now they were fairly in the country, for from this spot to Tyburn there were nothing but green fields and gardens surrounding gentlemen's houses.

But the road was broad, and the procession moved forward at a rather quicker pace.

Still it was a slow one.

But at every step they took, Jack's hope of rescue and escape became less and less, and fainter and fainter.

Wearily and listlessly did he look about him.

His head pained him exceedingly.

There was the heavy blow he had received when he fell upon the door-step, and the two Jonathan had given him, besides the fall out of the cart, which had injured him severely.

From all this, it will be seen that his position was far from being a comfortable one, setting aside the fact that he was riding in the condemned cart, and within a mile of Tyburn.

Had it not been for these last circumstances, and the terrible state of mind he was necessarily in, he would have felt with a much greater degree of keenness the pain from the various hurts he had received.

From the time Jonathan had struck him, Jack had not uttered one word.

As for the thief-taker himself, he sat in the cart with his arms folded, and with a dogged expression upon his face.

There was, somehow or other—perhaps in consequence of the words Jack had spoken—a disagreeable, heavy feeling, which he in vain endeavoured to shake off.

The moment—the crowning moment—of his triumph was, he felt sure, close at hand; and yet he did not feel near so comfortable nor so elated and joyous as he always imagined he should feel whenever that moment did arrive.

He felt nervous and uneasy, and the sensation seemed to grow upon him as he approached Tyburn Tree.

Little, however, did Jonathan imagine what kind of turn his fortunes were about to take.

As little, too, did he dream of what was taking place in London at that very moment.

There was a little surprise in store for Jonathan Wild, and one that he would not recover from very easily.

And still the procession kept on its weary way.

Jack ceased to look about him.

He bent his head down, and let his chin rest dejectedly upon his breast, while his eyes were fixed upon the rough planks at the bottom of the cart.

What were his thoughts at that moment?

No pen—no matter how powerful—could give an adequate idea of them at that moment.

We shall not attempt to do so.

We know full well that we should signally fail, and therefore we leave it to the imagination of the reader.

The words, however, which were written on the paper tied round the stems of the flowers of which the nosegay was composed, were continually before his mind.

They implied that Blueskin would save him; but no effort had been made as yet.

Jack could not think that a rescue would be attempted at the foot of the scaffold.

An attempt made at that moment could not do otherwise than result in failure.

Jack was certain there was no hope in that quarter.

Such precautions would be taken to form a barrier round the scaffold that would be impassable even to well-trained troops.

A disorderly multitude would not stand the ghost of a chance.

No; Jack felt that without the rescue was attempted before the procession reached Tyburn, it would be utterly useless.

All around him there were no signs of it.

The mob were more peaceable and quiet than they had hitherto been.

They seemed to be worn out by the exertions they had already made.

The interest of the spectacle was also rapidly increasing, and they strained their eyes eagerly in advance, in order to catch sight of the dreadful triple tree.

The old gallows, with its blackened timbers, to which so many criminals had been suspended, Jack Sheppard had cut down.

But the authorities had promptly erected another on the same spot.

It was the new gibbet that the people were so anxious to see.

It had not yet been made use of, and it seemed as though Jack Sheppard was destined to be the first victim suspended from it.

This was an honour he would gladly have declined.

A rushing, roaring sound was then all that came from the mob at this juncture.

They no longer threw missiles and uttered fierce cries and execrations.

And now, as he gazed down upon the bottom of the cart, Jack fancied he could distinguish the features of the girl he loved so well.

Her delicate and beautiful countenance was in fancy as distinctly visible as if it had been painted there.

It had upon it an expression of great pain and sadness, which afterwards changed to terror and alarm.

All this was but the disordered creation of his brain; still he gazed long and eagerly.

Suddenly, however, he heard a loud, hoarse, prolonged shout.

It came from the people.

Eagerly he looked up, in the hope that the expected rescue was now about to take place.

CHAPTER CCCXXI.

TYBURN IS REACHED AT LAST, AND JACK KETCH COMMENCES HIS TERRIBLE PREPARATIONS.

JACK SHEPPARD looked around.

The people still surrounded the cart, but their gaze was no longer directed towards him.

Their faces were turned in the direction in which they were proceeding.

It was evident that he was no longer the chief object of attraction.

Something else had usurped the popular attention.

Jack sighed.

He was disappointed.

No rescue was about to be attempted—he felt quite sure of that.

Naturally enough, he, too, turned his eyes in the direction in which the people looked.

One glance was sufficient.

Then he averted his eyes.

He understood all in a moment.

Indeed, he blamed himself for not having thought of it before.

The people uttered that shout because at that moment they had caught sight of the triple tree.

It was to this object that all their attention was given.

Jack did not look again.

He was quite satisfied with the hasty glimpse he had had of the three crossbeams.

But he became conscious that the ordinary was reading aloud.

He was reading the burial service.

It was the custom to do this when the cart came in sight of the gallows.

Jack was just conscious that he was speaking, but no more.

The words he uttered fell upon his ear, but they did not penetrate to his understanding.

His thoughts were otherwise engaged.

And now the corner of the Edgware Road was reached.

Tyburn Tree was only a few yards distant.

A strange hush came upon the people.

All were silent.

Round the gallows itself such a crowd of people had assembled as made those which had crowded round Newgate and accompanied the procession sink into insignificance.

But, as before, Jack's eyes roamed in vain over the ocean of faces in search of one that was friendly to him.

All seemed to wear just one expression, and that was curiosity.

Curiosity to see the termination of Jack Sheppard's career.

Heavier and heavier grew his heart.

In all human probability he had but a few minutes more to live.

Would aid come?

Alas! it seemed impossible.

The progress of the cart was slower now than ever.

In spite of all the precautions taken, they could not keep the mob at a distance.

When once they were within the line which the mounted soldiers had for so many hours maintained round the gallows, of course it was another affair.

And Jack, as he watched the slow approach of the cart to this circle, suffered an unparalleled amount of anxiety.

He felt that when he was once within the boundary, all hope of rescue would be over.

The mob could not force a passage through the soldiers. And now that line of soldiers was only a few yards off.

Another moment, and the cart would be within its precincts.

Jack looked around with glaring eyes and parted lips.

On every side were faces—faces innumerable; but all were still—all were occupied in looking at him.

There was not the slightest appearance of a movement.

Despair struggled hard to trample out the last hope that quivered in his heart.

Despair was the victor.

Hope was annihilated.

The cart passed among the soldiers who guarded the scaffold.

They closed around it, hemming it in completely.

Wild drew a long breath at the same moment that a sigh of despair issued from Jack Sheppard's lips.

The dread had all the time been upon him that an attempt would be made to rescue the prisoner.

He had feared it at every step, and when he saw how vast a multitude was assembled round Tyburn Tree, he felt certain that the effort would be made.

Oh, how he congratulated himself upon having had the foresight to suggest such a close guard round the gallows—how he longed to accelerate the pace of the cart—how anxiously he awaited the moment when it would pass through the ranks of the soldiers and be in safety!

Jonathan Wild felt as some captain might feel whose vessel was in immediate danger of destruction, but who can see before him a haven of perfect safety.

Can the reader, then, imagine what a relief it was to the thief-taker when he found the cart actually within the lines?

Now he was safe.

He turned towards Jack, who at this moment seemed to be listening to the ordinary's exhortations.

But Jonathan did not scruple to attract his attention to himself.

He touched Jack on the shoulder.

"Ha, ha! Safe at last, Jack—safe at last! I am more glad than if anyone had given me a thousand pounds this minute! There's no fear of a rescue now! I shall triumph at last! What do you think of your croaking now? You said you should live to see me tucked up, didn't you? Ha, ha! A good joke that! You made a little mistake, though! You ought to have changed the persons! I shall see you tucked up, Jack! Ha, ha!"

To this triumphant speech, Jack Sheppard returned no answer.

The fact of the matter was, the nearness of his fate appalled him.

It stared him full in the face.

Nearer and nearer went the cart, until at length it paused exactly underneath the fatal beam.

Jack gave one look upward, and shuddered.

Jonathan Wild watched him narrowly.

The ordinary continued to read the burial service—to read it over one who was alive.

Considerable confusion prevailed around Tyburn Tree.

It was caused by the sheriffs and other officials taking up their proper positions.

All this occupied some time.

The soldiers had much difficulty in withstanding the pressure of the immense multitude and preserving their line unbroken.

But their numbers, and the position they had taken up, enabled them to perform their arduous duties successfully.

Outside this living wall the people yelled and shouted, screamed and fought.

They were impatient at the delay, and anxious for the performance to commence.

On their part, the sheriffs and other officials were full as anxious as the mob that the ceremony should be concluded, for the usual hour was past.

It was verging upon one o'clock.

As soon as the cart was just under one of the cross-beams of Tyburn Tree, the hangman stopped his horse, and dropping the reins upon his back, crawled into the back of the cart where Jack Sheppard sat.

There was a hideous and malignant grin upon the countenance of Jack Ketch as he approached the pinioned prisoner.

It was evident that he contemplated the loathsome task he had to perform with feelings of satisfaction.

The ordinary still read the prayers, but Jack Sheppard's whole attention was absorbed by watching every movement that the hangman made.

Jonathan Wild, too, sat still in his seat, with his eyes fixed upon Jack Ketch as though with some kind of fascination.

The hangman was most deliberate in all he did.

While he was thus engaged, the sheriffs were going through the ceremony of handing over the prisoner from their custody, together with the warrant authorising his execution.

Jack Ketch stooped down and raised the lid of the rudely-made coffin.

Then thrusting his hand into the interior, he drew out a piece of rope.

It was long and rather thin, but it was closely woven, and would bear a very heavy weight.

This rope the hangman passed carefully through his hand in order to see that there were no flaws in it.

Then balancing it carefully, he threw one end over the crossbeam overhead.

The feat was a difficult one and was skilfully done, but then, Jack Ketch had had so much practice.

Tying the rope into a running knot, he pulled at one end until the noose was firmly fixed round the crossbeam.

He hung upon the rope once or twice to test its strength, then, apparently satisfied with the result, he turned his attention to other matters.

The people in the crowd had seen these preliminary proceedings gone through many a time, and yet they must have possessed a strange and fearful amount of interest, for they watched them now quite as breathlessly as they could have done upon the first occasion.

In this respect, even Jonathan Wild was no exception.

Such being the case, the reader may perhaps be able to form an idea of the eagerness with which Jack Sheppard gazed upon the scene.

All those horrible and sickening preparations were being made for him.

So intent was he upon what was going forward, that he in a great measure became oblivious of his dreadful position.

But consciousness was brought back to him in a very rude and disagreeable manner.

The executioner, having proceeded so far in his task, now came nearer, and bade Jack Sheppard stand up.

He caught hold of him by the collar of his coat.

Jonathan did the same, and so between them Jack was quickly raised to his feet.

The ordinary, too, rose.

Jack Sheppard could make little or no resistance.

His arms were pinioned.

His brain was confused by the heavy blows he had received, and his mind dulled by the intense horror which he felt.

He was half stupified—half out of his senses.

Before he was aware of it, the thin hard rope insinuated itself round his neck like a snake.

He felt the hangman's fingers about his neck, but he had no longer the power to shrink from the hateful and disgusting touch.

But he shuddered perceptibly.

The crowd was as silent as death.

Not a sound came from the whole of that vast assemblage—all was as silent as though they had been in a desert.

The people seemed even to suspend their breath, so anxious were they not to lose a sight or sound.

Their faculties were wholly bound up in the scene that was enacting before them.

In a few minutes the show would be over.

The Governor and sheriffs also looked on—the former with feelings of triumph and exultation, for he saw that his revenge was at length about to be consummated.

Jack gazed once more upon the ocean of faces.

But their immovability, their steadfastness of expression crushed out all hope, if indeed he had any.

His heart seemed to turn to ice.

He could see that there was not the slightest probability of an attempt to rescue him being made.

He was left to his fate.

He would have to suffer, as many others had before him.

CHAPTER CCCCXLI.

JACK SHEPPARD IS EXECUTED ON TYBURN TREE, AND JONATHAN WILD'S REVENGE IS AT LAST GLUTTED.

JACK KETCH knew how to tie the knot in a systematic manner, and what was more, he knew how to do it in a very short time.

Still, while he was so occupied, he found the opportunity to whisper in Jack Sheppard's ear:

"Sorry for you, my lad!"

Sheppard wondered to hear the hangman pity him—he could not understand it.

However, he made no reply.

He had not the heart to ask the simple question why.

But the hangman spared him the trouble.

"I am sorry for you, Jack, because you will die so hard; you are such a light weight—a very light weight indeed; you will not be heavy enough to strangle yourself; but never mind, when I have drawn the cart away I will hang on to your legs, and then you will soon be out of your misery."

Jack Sheppard quivered with horror as these awful words came upon his ears, uttered as they were in the most commonplace tone in the world.

In the manner in which executions were then performed, it frequently happened that the executioner had to perform the service he had mentioned.

There was no sudden fall to cause instantaneous death—it was a prolonged, painful strangulation.

The victim kicked, and writhed, and struggled, and often the executioner would take hold of the culprit's legs and hang upon them.

The superadded weight of his body had the effect of completing the strangling process.

The heaviest persons of course died easiest.

Now Jack was always a light weight, and what with one thing and another, he had become reduced to a perfect skeleton, so that the hangman's prophecy seemed likely to be fulfilled.

These whispered words escaped the ears of Jonathan Wild.

In another moment the knot was tied, and the executioner was ready.

"Now, Jack," he said, "if you have got anything to say to the people, now's the time to say it—you must be quick though!"

"Yes, Jack," said Wild, exultantly, "say your last say. Ha, ha! I told you this day would come at last, and here it is. Jack, in one more minute you will be dancing upon nothing. I thought you said you were going to see me tucked up! The boot's on the other leg—ha, ha!"

Dejectedly and despairingly Jack Sheppard once more looked around him, but, as before, he could see no hope.

A choking sensation was in his throat. It seemed to him that the rope was already pressing out his life.

He felt no inclination to speak.

And yet he thought he would make an effort.

"Good people, I call upon you all to witness that I am perfectly innocent of the crime for which I am condemned to die. The case was got up against me by Jonathan Wild, and he caused me to be found guilty."

Jack spoke at the top of his lungs, but his voice was weak and wavering, and did not reach beyond the circle of soldiers.

The people who were near could tell he was speaking, but though they strained their hearing to the utmost they could not distinguish what he said.

Every preparation was now made.

The ordinary shut up his book, and made an undignified descent from the cart.

Jonathan prepared to follow.

But he went first up to his victim.

"Good-bye, Jack! I told you what would be the end of your opposition, but you would not believe me. As soon as you are comfortably out of the way, I shall turn my attention to Edgworth Bess. Ha, ha! She will soon forget you, and then she will become Mrs. Wild the

Sixth! I shall have no further interruptions from you—all will be plain-sailing now! Good-bye to you!"

The people began to groan and hiss, and Jonathan jumped down out of the cart.

Jack Ketch was ready.

He seized the horse by the bridle, and gave him a sharp cut with the whip.

The cart moved.

Jack felt the boards slipping from beneath his feet, and tried frantically to save himself.

But it was to no purpose.

The cart moved away in spite of him.

In another moment, all that intervened between him and death would have passed away.

He would be dangling in space.

Oh, those awful moments while the cart was drawn away!

Then there was a sudden plunge.

Jack felt the cart go from beneath his feet.

He felt himself fall for a second.

Then he stopped with a jerk that seemed as though it would tear his head from his shoulders.

His windpipe was compressed, and a horrible choking feeling made itself manifest.

He struggled furiously.

All the blood in his body seemed to rush up into his head at once.

So suddenly and fiercely, that he fancied his brain would surely burst in the effort to find some place of escape.

His face grew frightfully distorted, and he writhed in horrible convulsions.

His eyeballs seemed to burn like globes of fire.

Then suddenly, and to the surprise of all present, Jack's struggles ceased.

He hung down straight and motionless, while his body swung slowly to and fro in the faint breeze, turning at the same time from side to side.

It was just at this moment that the executioner came under the gallows.

His intention was to humanely hang on by Jack's legs and put him out of his misery.

But, when he saw him hanging so still and lifeless, he exclaimed, in a voice of astonishment:

"Well, I'm blest! Now, who would have thought of that?"

"Of what?"

It was Jonathan Wild who spoke.

He, too, was beneath the gallows, and standing close by the side of Jack Ketch.

"I say, who would have thought it?"

"Thought what, idiot?"

"That he would have died so easy."

"Is he dead?"

"Oh, never doubt it! That was a *scientific* knot that I tied, I can tell you! He's dead enough!"

"But I thought he would have struggled longer."

"So did I; and when I saw what a *natomy* he was, I made sure I should have to pull him down by his legs; but he died uncommon easy!"

Jonathan looked up at the body.

All the signs of a violent death were in the swollen and impurpled countenance.

He turned away satisfied.

Jack Sheppard was no more.

"At last!" Wild muttered—"at last I am free from that young imp of mischief! He's dead now, and it's all over with him!"

But somehow, Wild could not help acknowledging to himself that he did not feel half so elated and overjoyed as he thought he should.

Like a good many people who fancy they shall be supremely happy when something or other is accomplished, he felt disappointed.

He was not half so happy as he thought he should be.

Indeed, a feeling of great depression began to steal over him, but this he strove to banish as much as possible.

He looked up again, but there was the body, dead and limp enough.

Jack was dead.

And Jonathan, in his heart, almost wished he wasn't.

For some time past, the thief-taker had lived in a state of intense excitement.

But now that the object which he had had in view was achieved, the reaction began.

Mr. Noakes rubbed his hands together in his usual sickly fashion.

"Ahem! Mr. Wild!" he said, approaching the thief-taker. "Ahem! It's all over now, I am happy to say!"

"Yes—yes!"

"Dear me, Mr. W., you don't seem at all pleased!"

"Peace, idiot!"

The Governor shrank back a little.

He thought his best policy would be not to irritate the thief-taker while in his present disagreeable mood.

Jonathan clasped his hands behind his back, and paced up and down the open space which the soldiers preserved.

In the meantime, another scene was going on close at hand, which was more important than it would seem to be at a first glance.

After having performed their duties, the sheriffs had returned to their carriages, and now that the execution was all over, they were about to return.

But before they could start, a singular-looking being made his appearance close to the carriage of the high-sheriff.

Where he had come from, or how he had got where he was, no one could tell.

His sudden appearance was most extraordinary.

No doubt he had taken advantage of the time when the attention of everyone was riveted upon Jack to push himself forward.

But there he was, and those who saw him stared as though he had just dropped from the clouds.

And in truth his personal appearance was extraordinary enough to attract immediate attention.

This singular being was dressed in a long, faded brown coat, of the kind that was fashionable in the reign of Queen Anne.

This cloak he had got wrapped closely around him, so that the whole of his body was concealed.

Above the cloak could be seen his head.

Beneath it his feet.

His face was buried deeply in the folds of his cloak, and on his head he wore a tall, foreign-looking, conical-shaped hat, such as might have been worn a couple of centuries before.

In the hat there was one black feather, which stood up rigid, and looking more like a steel ornament than a feather.

It looked as though it had been plucked out of the wing of some bird.

Such was the singular figure that appeared close to the door of the sheriff's carriage.

"Your excellency," he said, in a respectful voice, and making a low bow after almost every word he spoke—"your excellency, I should feel obliged if you would grant me a few minutes' attention."

The fat sheriff seemed rather pleased than otherwise with the title of "excellency," so he bowed his head in what he considered a highly-dignified manner.

The strange-looking individual who had addressed him interpreted his bow as a permission to proceed.

"Your excellency, I am a foreigner—a German—a countryman of your King! I am a chemist, and am making some experiments for his Majesty's pleasure!"

"Step into the carriage, my dear sir," said the sheriff, who was loyal to the backbone, "and then I will talk to you. Did you say you were a countryman of his most gracious Majesty's?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"Then give me your hand. I am delighted to make your acquaintance. Did you say you had the honour of making experiments for his Majesty?"

"I did, your excellency," said the strange-looking man, with another bow; "and only this morning I was in conversation with his Majesty!"

"This morning, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Then let me shake hands with you again!"

The sheriff was immensely delighted.

He was one of those who are always ready to fawn upon those who happen to be in high places.

He was credulous, too, especially where there was anything connected with royalty.

And so he believed, without hesitation, what his singular visitor said to him.

He thought nothing of the strange, dingy cloak and general appearance of poverty, for he knew very well that at that time the Germans hanging about the Court did not cut a very respectable figure.

They had not been in the country long enough for sufficient taxes to be collected to clothe them.

CHAPTER CCCCXLII.

AN EXTRAORDINARY APPLICATION RESPECTING THE DEAD BODY OF JACK SHEPPARD IS MADE TO THE HIGH-SHERIFF BY A GERMAN CHEMIST.

THE sheriff well knew there were plenty of distant relations of the royal family who were no better off than this chemist appeared to be.

Of course, all that sort of thing was soon altered, and at the present day their descendants are fed and clothed with the taxes collected from the English nation.

However, that has nothing to do with our story.

Let it suffice to mention that the sheriff fully believed that the German chemist was just what he said he was.

After shaking hands, the chemist continued:

"I saw his Majesty this morning, and reported the progress I had made in my experiments, with which he expressed himself satisfied."

"Happy man!" sighed the sheriff; "would I could hear him say the same words to me!"

"Wait a moment, your excellency, and then I will tell you what his Majesty said of you!"

"Of me?"

"Yes."

"What—what?"

"In one moment, your excellency—I will tell you in one moment what the King said about you."

"About me?"

"Yes—you are the high-sheriff, are you not?"

"I am that lucky man!"

"I thought so."

"Pray go on!"

"I will, your excellency. When his Majesty had expressed himself satisfied with my labours, he said, 'By the way, there is a young fellow named Sheppard, who is to be executed this morning!'"

"Did his Majesty say that?"

"Those were his very words."

"Do go on!"

"I told his Majesty that he was correct, and then he added, 'You must try your experiments upon him!'"

"Upon me?"

"No—upon Jack Sheppard!"

"Oh!"

"Not you, of course."

"But Jack Sheppard is dead!"

"Yes, there he hangs!"

"How can you perform your experiments, then?"

"Let me whisper to your excellency an important royal secret."

The sheriff eagerly leaned forward to listen.

"I am to perform my experiments upon his dead body!"

The sheriff drew back with great suddenness, and glared in the speaker's face.

"On his dead body?"

"Yes."

"Oh, gracious!"

"But I haven't told you what his Majesty said about yourself!"

"No—no!"

"Then I will do so at once."

"Pray do!"

The sheriff wiped his face with his pocket-handkerchief.

"His Majesty said to me: 'That is a very singular young man, and you must not omit upon any account to perform your experiments upon him. Is not the high-sheriff a Mr. Knobbles?'"

"Did his Majesty say that?"

"Most certainly!"

"Then his royal highness knew my unworthy name?"

"His Majesty knows everything!"

"Oh, ah! yes, of course!"

"The high-sheriff," said his Majesty, "is Mr. Knobbles—he is a true, devoted, and most loyal subject, and I feel the profoundest regard for him."

"Stop, stop!"

The sheriff was completely overcome.

"That's what his Majesty said."

"Did he say any more?"

"Oh yes!"

"What—what?"

"He said, 'Go to High-Sheriff Knobbs, and tell him all, and that it is my desire that the body of Jack Sheppard be given up to you, in order that you may perform your experiments upon it.'"

"Oh dear!"

"That was what he said, your excellency."

"And I am to deliver the body to you?"

"Yes."

"But suppose his friends claimed it?"

"You must not trouble his Majesty about that."

"No, no—certainly not!"

"In order that there should be no mistake about it, his Majesty wrote this note, which he commanded me to deliver to you."

The German chemist produced from under his cloak a folded piece of paper.

The sheriff snatched at it eagerly, and unfolded it.

In a large, straggling, ungainly-looking hand, the following words were written:—

"*Deliver the body of Sheppard to bearer.*—GEORGE R."

"Is this his Majesty's writing?"

"It is."

"I may keep it?"

"Yes; and you will excuse me for saying that I consider his Majesty's autograph to be reward enough for what you are going to do—very few persons are favoured with it."

"I know that—I know that!" said the sheriff, trembling with joy.

"In return for it, all I want is an order from you to deliver the body of Jack Sheppard to me."

"You shall have it!"

"Here are writing materials," said the German chemist, instantly producing pencil and paper from beneath his cloak.

The sheriff took them almost mechanically, and began to write.

The German chemist watched him anxiously.

The sheriff made several mistakes, but at length the document was completed.

He handed it to the German chemist, who received it with a low bow, while a smile of exultation crossed his face.

By this time the procession was ready to start on its return, and the Governor of Newgate came to the sheriff's carriage to know whether he was ready.

The German chemist made a bow.

He held out to the Governor the order he had just received.

Mr. Noakes read it with surprise, and then bent an inquiring glance upon the sheriff, who was, however, entirely absorbed by the King's autograph.

"It's all right!" he said. "On his Majesty's service—all right!"

"The high-sheriff says it's all right," remarked the German chemist, as he prepared to alight from the carriage.

The Governor was rather mystified, but he drew back and allowed the chemist to pass.

"Are you ready to return, Mr. Knobbs?"

"Yes—yes! Back as soon as possible!"

The sheriff was impatient to get back to the City, in order that he might have the delight of exhibiting his Majesty's autograph and repeating what had taken place.

A very triumphant expression appeared upon the face of the German chemist, as he made his way towards the gallows.

There the body of Jack Sheppard still hung, swaying gently to and fro, as before.

Jonathan Wild was still pacing up and down.

The hangman had put a nosebag on his horse, and had seated himself upon the shafts of the cart, where he smoked a short black pipe with great apparent relish.

He was waiting for the hour to expire, at the end of which the body would be cut down, placed in the coffin, and driven back to Newgate.

Jonathan Wild looked more uneasy and uncomfortable than ever.

A presentiment that something strange was about to happen pressed upon him, and increased in intensity every moment.

But what it could be he could not tell.

He wanted to get back to London.

It was while pacing up and down in the restless manner we have described, that his thoughts reverted to his house.

He recollected how it had been burned, and wondered whether any of the secrets it contained had been brought to light.

Now that all was over, he blamed himself for having kept with so much persistency in Jack Sheppard's cell.

"I was a fool," he said; "but never mind—I have been successful, and ought not to grumble. I will just wait and see him cut down, and then I shall feel sure that all is right. I shall then trouble myself no further about Jack Sheppard, but make my way back to London with all speed—it is time I was there. It is time I looked to my house, and took such measures as would effectually prevent any disagreeable discoveries from being made. I will go, but I will wait and see him cut down first."

Thus muttering to himself, Jonathan continued his restless pacing up and down.

The German chemist, with the important paper tightly clenched in his right hand, crept to the side of the cart, and stood there, being all the time hidden from Jonathan Wild's view.

Indeed, he avoided the thief-taker with the utmost sedulousness.

Why, will probably be seen in due time.

He was now waiting for Jonathan Wild to go.

In the meanwhile, the procession set out on its return journey.

It was accompanied by some thousands of people.

The execution was over, and there was only the cutting down to see.

This was not a very interesting ceremony, and yet many stayed an hour on purpose to witness it.

Still the crowd perceptibly thinned, and, by the time the hour had elapsed, the crowd was trifling in comparison to what it had been.

Once more, then, when the appointed time arrived, the hangman drew his cart underneath Tyburn Tree.

He was going to "pluck the fruit," as he facetiously termed what he was about to do.

He still smoked his pipe.

When he climbed up into the cart, of course he came into full sight of the mob, and a loud yell instantly followed.

With an indifference, however, that was truly stoical, he proceeded with his task.

He took a knife out of his pocket, and began sawing away at the rope with great deliberation.

But the edge was keen, and the strands of rope were quickly divided.

The last few parted with a sudden snap, and then down fell the body into the cart with a crash that was sickening to hear.

"There he is, then, Mr. Wild!" said Jack Ketch, addressing the thief-taker, who had climbed up the wheel of the cart to have a last look at the body. "Dead enough, isn't he?"

Jonathan did not deign to reply.

With his feet resting on the spokes of the wheel, and his hands clutching the sides of the clumsy vehicle, he took his last look at the countenance of Jack Sheppard.

Very still and very horrible did that slight, slim figure look.

The features were frightfully distorted, so much so as to make recognition a matter of great difficulty.

Wild remained gazing for a moment, and then, jumping down, he made his way back to London at the best of his speed.

He was anxious, now that his pertinacious enemy was disposed of, that he should set his house in order a little.

Jack Ketch lifted up the limp, warm body, and placed it in the coffin, which was much too large for Jack; but, then, it was better so than too small.

It was quite a matter of chance, for the coffins were all made by contract, and they were by no means particular about the fit.

Jack was easily accommodated, and the rude lid hid his remains from the light of day.

CHAPTER CCCCXLIII.

THE LANDLORD OF THE INN IN SMITHFIELD SHOWS BLUESKIN THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR JACK SHEPPARD TO BE SAVED FROM DEATH.

MANY of our readers have no doubt surmised that there is some mystery connected with the individual in the long, faded brown cloak, who had called himself a German chemist.

What that mystery is, however, and whether he really was what he professed to be, must remain for the present a secret.

But the reader will not be long kept in suspense.

In order to elucidate the events which we have recently described, it will be necessary to go back a little, and relate the proceedings of other characters in our story.

It will be remembered, then, that Blueskin, having arrived in London on the very morning appointed for Jack Sheppard's execution, and only a few hours before the time fixed for the sentence to be carried into effect, had repaired to an inn in Smithfield Market, the landlord of which had overwhelmed him by communicating the astounding intelligence that Jack was about to be executed.

He showed him, too, how impossible it would be to save him, and convinced him that there was not time to make even an attempt.

Blueskin was crushed and overcome.

While conversing with the landlord, time flew rapidly, but each minute only served to convince Blueskin that he had arrived a few hours too late to be of assistance to his old comrade.

Then the landlord had said that he had thought of something—that he had something to propose, but that it was of such a preposterous nature that Blueskin would never listen to or think of acting upon it.

But Blueskin had seized with avidity upon what the landlord had said, and implored him to be more explicit.

It was just as the clock of St. Sepulchre's Church chimed a quarter past nine that the landlord said:

"Well, Blueskin, I will tell you what I consider is your only hope—your only chance."

"Speak on, then! What is it?"

"It is to obtain possession of Jack's body after he has been executed!"

"What?" said Blueskin, in a voice of horror.

"And when you have got it, try to resuscitate him!"

"Impossible!"

"I knew you would say so."

"And do you think that such a scheme as that holds out the least chance of success?"

"I do, or I should not have proposed it."

"Oh, I am maddened—maddened! It seems such a desperate thing to do!"

"Still, it is a last resort."

"It is. But something shall be tried before that."

"Very good, but if you agree to what I propose and thoroughly hear me out, don't you see that you will be left to try any other desperate speculation you may think of just the same?"

"Well, go on."

"I have not much to say. I believe it is your only chance."

"But do you think that there would be any chance of resuscitating him after the sentence was once carried into effect?"

"Such things have been known."

"Very true."

"And why should not Jack stand as good a chance as anyone else?"

"I know no reason why he should not."

"Very well, then. The whole thing lies in a nutshell."

"How so?"

"Thus—you will say, of course, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the execution proves fatal. Now, you want to know, perhaps, why I think Jack Sheppard will be the one out of the ninety-nine."

"Do you think he will?"

"I feel almost sure of it."

"Why?"

"He is such a light chap. He must weigh a mere nothing."

"He does not weigh much."

"And what with imprisonment and illness, and one

thing and another, his frame has been very much reduced."

"It has—it has."

"Very well, then, it is my deliberate conviction that when the cart is drawn from underneath him his own weight will not be sufficient to compress his neck tight enough to cause his death."

"But this is awful."

"I admit that, but nevertheless I consider my hope is well grounded."

"It is—it is; but it makes me shudder."

"It is only natural that it should; however, you can see, from what I have said, that there is a chance, should things come to the worst, that he may be restored to life."

"There is. But what a horrible existence it would be!"

"Not so bad as no existence at all."

"Very true."

"Well, then, that is just how the case stands. You can try your best to save Jack's neck from the hangman's rope, but if you fail, you have still the chance of bringing him back to life again."

"Would that I had been here sooner!"

"There is no time for unavailing regrets."

"Right! We have much to do! But pardon me if I am overcome—I am not myself!"

"I can understand your feelings."

"But stop! There is something else to be considered!"

"What?"

"If we succeed in getting Jack's body, who will revive it?"

"That is no difficulty! You leave that to me!"

"Can you do it?"

"No; but I know a very clever man who can—that is, if it is in mortal power to do so!"

"Who is he?"

"A physician who lives in Long Acre. He is a strange man, and most people think he is a little mad; but that is because he is not understood."

"And this man can do it?"

"If anyone can."

"And will he?"

"Oh yes, if I apply to him!"

"It is a secret, I suppose?"

"What? how he performs his mysterious task?"

"Yes."

"I believe it is."

"He lives in Long Acre, you say?"

"Yes; he keeps a small shop, where drugs and chemicals are sold. This keeps him, and he spends the whole of his time in making experiments. His house is full of apparatus."

"Has he ever revived anyone before?"

The landlord glanced about him uneasily, and then sinking his voice to a whisper, said:

"He has!"

"Who?"

"Never mind that now! I found out the means by accident, I believe."

"And is he to be trusted?"

"Entirely!"

St. Sepulchre's clock chimed a quarter to ten.

"How the time flies!"

"It does whenever there is important business on hand. I confess the thing which gives me the greatest uneasiness is, that I fear that Jonathan Wild and the authorities will not give up the body."

"Ah, I had not thought of that!"

"Nor I till just as I spoke. That will prove a serious obstacle."

"It will indeed! If application is made, Wild's suspicions are sure to be aroused!"

"Well, I shall speak about that to the chemist, or whatever he is. There is time enough for that. I have thought of something else. Wait a moment."

The landlord hastened to the door of the room, and cried out:

"Sarah—Sarah! Come here—I want you."

In reply to this call, a young girl, about nineteen or twenty years of age, entered the room.

"Go and fetch me a nice nosegay of flowers. Make haste—be back here in an instant!"

"I thought that would save time," said the landlord,



[THE GERMAN CHEMIST CARRIES THE BODY OF JACK SHEPPARD TO HIS LABORATORY.]

returning to Blueskin. "While she is gone I can explain."

"What—what is it?"

"It would be well if we could communicate with Jack."

"I would give the world!"

"Good! I will tell you how we shall easily be able to convey a message to him."

"How?"

"Write what you want to say on this slip of paper. It must only be a few words, mind!"

"And how shall you contrive to give it to him unseen?"

"Well, of course you know that it is a custom when anyone is taking a last ride for some friend or relation or sweetheart to stand upon the steps of St. Andrew's Church and give the condemned man a bunch of flowers?"

"Yes, yes—it is nearly always done."

No. 93.—BLUESKIN.

"It is, and now my plan becomes clear. Whatever you write, I shall tie round the stem of the flowers."

"And who will give him the bunch?"

"Sarah."

"But, if the streets are so crowded, how will she get to the church steps?—the procession will start in half an hour."

"Oh, that will be easy enough! She has only to let the people about her know what she intends to do, and they will give her a free passage through them, for all are friendly disposed towards Jack Sheppard."

"It is a poor advantage to take of such a feeling."

"I grant that; but we must do the best we can. Now, what are you going to write?"

Blueskin wrote on the slip of paper:

"Escape if you can! If you can't, put trust in me and hope!"

"That will do capitally!"

At this moment, Sarah, the landlord's daughter, entered, carrying in her hand a large nosegay.

The landlord tied the slip of paper round it very quickly, and while doing so told the girl what he wanted her to do.

She consented gladly and willingly, for Jack Sheppard was a special favourite of hers, and she rejoiced at the prospect of being able to render him a service.

Off she sped at a rapid rate, and was not long in reaching the outskirts of the crowd.

Putting on an anxious look, and assuming a sad tone of voice, she asked to be allowed to pass to the foot of the church steps, in order that she might give the nosegay to her sweetheart, Jack Sheppard.

As the landlord had foretold, the people made way with the greatest willingness, and in less time than anyone would have believed possible, considering the density of the crowd and the distance she had to go.

But she was only just in time.

In a former chapter we have described how she succeeded in giving the nosegay to Jack.

When she had performed her mission, she sank back quietly among the crowd, and returned home with all the speed she could make.

As soon as he had despatched his daughter on this errand, the landlord, addressing himself to Blueskin, said:

"And now, if you will be guided by me and take my advice, you will give up all idea of attempting a rescue."

"Never!"

"Nay, listen to me! Don't throw away the chance you have got! I can assure you the authorities, with your own recent escape before their eyes, have taken such careful precautions that it will be impossible to succeed; the military are out in vast numbers, and the old tree at Tyburn is as well defended as though walled round with brass. Once more I say, take my advice and abandon the thought, for the attempt must result in a failure!"

Blueskin paced the room uneasily.

"I feel inclined to try."

"I know you do, but just think how serious and deplorable it would be if you were to be captured. In the event of it, they would not let you go again, I can promise you that. They were more than a match for Jack Sheppard this time."

"So it seems."

"The cart will be guarded by men who will resist easily whatever attack might be made upon them, and you must not forget that you have not got any organised plan; if you had, it would be different, but still you would fail."

CHAPTER CCCCXLIV.

THE GERMAN CHEMIST UNDERTAKES THE TASK OF RESTORING JACK SHEPPARD TO LIFE.

FOR some moments after the landlord had finished speaking, Blueskin remained silent.

He could not help admitting to himself that the landlord had got on his side both reason and common sense.

The authorities would of course adopt every precaution. The most probable result that would follow any attempt of his own to rescue Jack Sheppard would be his own capture.

"Don't you see that I am right?" persisted the landlord. "Why, if I thought there was the ghost of a chance I would help you heart and soul, but there isn't, and you know it."

"I cannot help confessing that I am forced to think so."

"I am glad you are able to look at things in a reasonable light; and now, if you will only be guided by me, you will adopt at once the only means of aiding Jack that lies in your power."

"What is that?"

"I will tell you in a moment. First of all though, as to that letter."

"Do you think your daughter will succeed in delivering it?"

"I have no doubts on that score."

"What about it, then?"

"Why, Jack, when he receives it, will, I think, make up

his mind to try his own resources, and not rely upon his friends for aid."

"You mean he will attempt to escape?"

"I think he will take the hint."

"But what chance has he?"

"Not much, I admit, but then, as you know very well, Jack has in his short lifetime done more extraordinary things than that."

"So he has."

"If he can once get among the people he will be right."

"Do you think it possible to leap out of the cart?"

"Well, I don't know that I could do it myself, but I don't believe it would be impossible to Jack Sheppard."

"And the people would befriend him?"

"To the utmost of their power."

"Then I hope he will be able to jump out of the cart."

"So do I, most heartily, and I will lay a hundred to one that he attempts it before he gets half-way."

"I trust he will succeed—I trust he will succeed!"

"We must prepare ourselves for every contingency."

Blueskin shuddered.

"It's no good mincing the matter!" continued the landlord.

"None whatever."

"Come, then, we will repair at once to the dwelling of this German chemist I spoke of. We have scarcely any time to make our arrangements with him. It is quite certain if we linger here any longer it will be too late."

"I am ready—lead the way!"

"Wait a moment; I will just go and fetch my hat, and tell my wife I am going out for an hour or two!"

The landlord left the room.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Blueskin began again to pace the room with rapid and irregular strides.

"What a horrible day is this!" he said. "Little did I dream that I should return to London and find things in such a condition as they are. Oh, this is horrible—most horrible!"

At this moment, the landlord re-entered the room.

"Come!" he said—"be quick!"

Blueskin muffled himself up in his cloak, and drew his hat down over his face in such a manner as almost to defy recognition.

Then he followed the landlord out of the parlour in which this important conference had taken place.

The customers that were crowded into the house when Blueskin arrived had now disappeared.

The landlord noted the fact with a significant smile.

"The procession has started," he said. "I can tell that by the house being so clear."

"Shall we be in time?"

"If we are quick we shall."

They had now emerged into the open air.

A little way off a hackney carriage was standing.

At Blueskin's request, the landlord hailed it, and the pair quickly seated themselves in the embrious vehicle.

"Drive to Long Acre!" said the landlord.

It was not so much with a view of saving time that Blueskin had hailed the hackney-coach, but because he was not so likely to be seen and recognised while seated in it as he would be if he ventured to traverse the streets of London on foot.

The driver had to make a considerable detour in order to reach his destination, because of the crowds of people that occupied the road which the procession would take.

But he had a couple of tolerable horses.

At length Long Acre was reached.

The landlord stopped the coach near the corner of Bow Street.

He paid the man his fare, and, in company with Blueskin, continued along the street in the direction of St. Martin's Lane.

He paused at length before a chemist's shop.

"This is the place," he said.

Blueskin looked up, and saw that he was standing before one of the darkest, dirtiest, dingiest houses in all Long Acre.

The shop was fitted with two small windows, with a door in the centre.

All the panes of glass were so thickly encrusted with dirt, that it was impossible to see through them, so that, by the windows alone, it would be impossible to tell what was vended in the shop.

Nor was there any signboard.

Decay and dilapidation were, however, visible on every side.

Blueskin took all this in at a glance.

He had no opportunity for a more minute examination, as the landlord took him by the arm and entered the shop. This was so dark inside, that it was with difficulty Blueskin made out the various features of it.

Filth and squalor were more and more discernible.

A disagreeable and peculiar smell, arising from the commingled odours of thousands of drugs, assailed their nostrils.

The landlord stamped on the ground with his foot.

Then a door at the back of the shop was opened.

Blueskin heard the sound, and turned his eyes in the direction from which it came; but the shop was so dark, that he could scarcely perceive the dim and shadowy figure of a man.

He advanced to the counter, and then Blueskin saw him more distinctly.

He was a little man, with a dirty, wrinkled, shrivelled face, with long, white hair, and with a black velvet skull-cap drawn round closely over his head.

His countenance presented the appearance which it ever wears when the owner of it has studied deeply.

But his eyes formed his most remarkable feature.

They were very small, but so bright, they seemed to have some illuminating power of their own, and to be capable of perceiving everything.

"What is it?" said the chemist, in a sharp, shrill voice.

"What do you want?"

"I want you!" said the landlord, in a peculiar tone of voice.

The chemist bent forward and peered into his customer's face.

"I know you!" he said. "Come in!—come this way!"

"I will!" said the landlord—"I want to speak to you upon a matter of the utmost importance!"

The old chemist led the way to the little dark room at the back of the shop from which he had emerged.

It was a small apartment, and Blueskin could not help looking about him in surprise and curiosity, for it was piled up and littered with scientific and chemical apparatus of every description.

The chemist placed chairs for his visitors.

"Now!" he said—"be good enough to tell me your business; and be as quick as you can about it, for my time is valuable!"

"I know that!" returned the landlord—"and so I will put my desires into a few words!"

"The fewer the better."

"Then I want you to bring back to life a man who will be hanged at Tyburn at twelve o'clock to-day!"

The chemist, with the utmost coolness imaginable, took out a gigantic silver watch.

"It's half-past eleven," he remarked, laconically.

"There is not much time."

"Very little!"

"Will you undertake the task?"

"I did a service of this kind for you once before, didn't I?"

"You did!" replied the landlord.

Blueskin noticed as he spoke that the landlord's voice faltered.

"You know my terms?"

"Yes."

"Five hundred pounds!"

"They shall be yours," said Blueskin; "and I will pay you half down now, if you will undertake the task!"

"No, no—never mind! I might fail, you know! Pay me in full as soon as I have performed my duty, and that will do."

"Agreed!"

"It is a bargain, then?"

"Yes."

"When will the body be brought here?"

"You must let me explain."

"Do you want me to gain possession of the body for you?"

"Yes."

"That will be extra!"

"You shall be paid."

"Enough; and now for particulars. What is the name of the man who is to be hanged?"

"Jack Sheppard."

"The devil! I ought to have asked more! But never mind, a bargain is a bargain!"

"You will have no room left to complain of my liberality!"

"Very good!"

Blueskin then proceeded to give the chemist some particulars which it was necessary he should know.

For instance, he told him how closely Jack would be guarded by soldiers and police officers, and how Jonathan Wild would probably not take his eyes off him.

When he had done, the chemist said:

"That is sufficient. Leave the rest to me! I have a plan all ready, but I must set about it at once, or I shall not have time to carry it out."

"Very good!"

"I shall claim the body and bring it here as soon as may be, and then I shall commence operations."

"Will you allow me to stay here while you are gone?" said Blueskin. "My friend, the landlord, to whom I am indebted for my introduction to you, will not want to stay, and it will be dangerous for me to be out in the street, and should I be recognised while entering or leaving your house, suspicion would be at once excited."

"You are right. You can remain here if you like."

"And I will go," said the landlord, "for I have matters of my own to attend to."

With these words he bade Blueskin and the chemist farewell, and took his departure.

Blueskin seated himself again.

"You can stay here," said the chemist, "and amuse yourself in the best way you are able. You will be quite safe. I have some preparations to make, and then I shall be ready to start."

"One word."

"What is it?"

The landlord spoke of your having performed a similar service once before."

"Well, and what if I did?"

"Simply this. Were you successful in your attempt to restore animation?"

"Perfectly."

Blueskin drew a sigh of relief.

"And who was the person?"

"The son of the man who has just left."

"Enough! I ought to have guessed it. I recollect Jonathan Wild caused his son to be executed."

"And I brought him back to life."

"Do the same thing for Jack Sheppard, and you shall receive any reward you like to ask for."

The chemist smiled.

"Wait here," he said. "I shall be away no longer than I can help, and if it is possible for anyone to succeed I will bring Jack back with me. I shall lock up the shop, so you will pay no attention, no matter who knocks. Sit here until I return."

With these words the chemist entered his shop.

Blueskin fervently hoped that there would be no need for his services to be called into requisition—that Jack would succeed in making his escape from the cart.

But in this expectation he was disappointed.

CHAPTER CCCCXLV.

THE GERMAN CHEMIST SUCCEEDS IN OBTAINING POSSESSION OF THE BODY OF JACK SHEPPARD.

It is not our intention, nor is it at all necessary, to minutely describe the chemist's preparations.

Let it suffice to say that he was very quick about all he did.

The reader is already acquainted with the details of his very clever scheme, and also with the success which, up to a certain point, attended it.

Considering the short time he had for devising it, he deserves very great credit for his plan.

He had met with an easy dupe in the person of Sheriff Knobbles, and in this, as in several other things, luck favoured him to a very great extent.

With respect to the sheriff, there is, we think, only one circumstance in connection with him with which we need trouble the reader.

Upon reaching London, he hastened at once to exhibit the autograph of the King.

He held the crumpled bit of paper in the air, and made

a long speech, which had the effect of raising the curiosity of his hearers to the highest possible pitch.

Then, amid the most breathless eagerness, he slowly unfolded the precious paper.

But when it was fairly spread open an ejaculation of dismay came from his lips, and he staggered back several paces.

The paper was blank.

There were no signs of ink upon it whatever.

The admiring circle to which he had been addressing himself were loud in making anxious inquiries.

But the sheriff looked like one stupefied.

He was quite unable to account for this phenomenon, and he behaved and spoke in such an eccentric way that they came at once to the conclusion that he had gone mad, and that all he had related to them had no foundation whatever in fact, but had been hatched up in his own deluded brain.

It was an additional aggravation to the sheriff to find that he was disbelieved; but his story was such an extraordinary one that the incredulity of his hearers is nothing to be wondered at.

But so it was.

The phenomenon which had so puzzled the sheriff is susceptible of easy explanation.

The German chemist was much too astute to commit himself by forging the King's signature.

Instead, then, of writing on the paper with ink, he used a simple chemical preparation, which exhibited all the appearance of ordinary ink for some time, and then faded away, leaving behind it not a trace of its presence.

So he was quite clear of that transaction, and in no danger of getting into trouble concerning it.

And now, for the last time, we return to Tyburn Tree.

We have described how Jack Sheppard's body was put into the coffin provided for it.

Jonathan had hastened back to London.

Now that Jack was fairly executed, he felt quite relieved upon that point.

The next thing he imagined would be that Jack would be buried in Newgate.

The idea of resuscitation never once entered his mind.

The German chemist watched Jonathan Wild take his departure with feelings of unalloyed satisfaction.

He felt that a great stumbling-block was removed.

Jack Ketch took his seat on the shafts of the cart, and set his horse in motion.

The jolting, clumsy vehicle started on its return journey to London.

The crowd of people had dispersed with extreme rapidity as soon as the cutting down ceremony was over.

A good many followed the cart.

Foremost among them was the German chemist.

He hung on by the board at the back, and none could remove him from his position.

He had to put out more strength, however, than anyone would have imagined he possessed.

Like some wild cat he clung firm, and maintained his hold in spite of all the attempts made to dash him aside.

As the cart moved further and further away from Tyburn the people became scattered, for they sought their own homes.

They had seen all they had to see.

But the chemist still kept his place.

The journey was a tedious one.

At length Bloomsbury Fields was reached.

Drawn up at the corner of a lane, which is now called Montague Street, was a dirty-looking hackney coach.

Just as the cart passed Montague House, a building that occupied part of the site of the present British Museum, the German chemist made his way round from the back to the front of the cart.

Without saying a word to the hangman, he stopped the horse.

The crowd had now diminished until it scarcely deserved the name.

There were only a few idle lookers-on upon the strange scene that followed.

Jack Ketch was in a terrible passion when he saw some one had stopped his horse, and he jumped to the ground in a very belligerent manner.

The German chemist, however, walked up to him with such a decided air that he shrank back.

"Hold!" he said. "You must stop here!"

"What for?"

"I want the body of Jack Sheppard!"

"Don't you wish you may get it?"

"I must have it!"

"And I say, don't you wish you may get it? Gee up, Captain!"

"I must have it!" said the chemist.

"Shan't let you, then!"

"But you must!"

"Not without an order from the sheriff, I don't!"

"And will you then?"

"Well—yes!"

"You know very well you dare not refuse! But come, I don't want to be disagreeable! I see no reason why there should be any ill-will between us!"

"Have you got the order?"

"Yes, I have."

"Let me look at it, then!"

"There it is."

The German chemist held up the paper he had obtained from the sheriff.

"That's an order, sure enough; but it's a burning shame!"

"Why?"

"To think I should be done out of my regulars!"

"Your what?"

"Regulars."

"What are they?"

"Why, the toggery, and all the little things he may happen to have in his pockets."

"Oh, I see!"

"Do you?"

"Yes. Just take the order a minute! There! Now, I suppose you wouldn't mind giving up your regulars if you had an equivalent for them?"

"An what?"

"A five-pound note, for instance!"

"A five-pun note! Oh, here you are! Tip us the flimsy, and take the carcass!"

From under that mysterious cloak of his the German chemist produced a five-pound Bank of England note.

"There—that will do!" he said.

"One minute!" added the chemist—"I'm not very strong, you know!"

"You don't look to be!"

"In return for the money I have just given you, I want you to carry the body to that hackney-coach yonder."

"All right! I s'pose you're a doctor?"

"I am."

"Are you going to dissect him?"

"Yes."

"Ah, well! I'm sorry he should go to the doctor's; but, however, business is business!"

"Of course it is!"

While speaking these words, Jack Ketch scrambled up into the cart.

"You don't want the coffin as well, do you?"

"No!"

"Very good! You can have it if you like, but it will be extra!"

"I don't want it."

"Then you sha'n't have it."

Jack Ketch then lifted the lid off the coffin, and those few persons who yet remained around the cart had the unexpected gratification of perceiving the body of Jack hoisted up on to the shoulders of Jack Ketch, and carried by him into the hackney-coach.

When this little ceremony was over, the German chemist got into the carriage as well, and told the driver to go on.

Jack Ketch stood at the corner of the lane, and watched the hackney-coach until a bend in the road hid it from his sight.

"This is a rum start," he said, "blessed if it isn't! But it don't matter a cuss to me, except that I've got the order, and am five pounds richer nor I should be!"

This last reflection contented him, and he resumed his seat on the shafts of the cart and drove on.

Many of the people, when they saw the body of Jack Sheppard transferred to the hackney-coach, also transferred their attention to that vehicle.

They ran after it as fast as their legs could carry them. The hackney-coach did not seem to be going fast, and

yet the people, one after another, dropped back and ceased to run after it.

Away the coach went in a perfectly straight line, and by the time it reached the open country there was not one individual in pursuit.

Jack Ketch had placed the body of Jack Sheppard rather roughly on the front seat in the coach.

The chemist at first took no notice of its presence, but knelt up on the cushions that covered the hind seat.

In the back of the coach there was a little window covered with a pad, which could be raised at pleasure by those within.

The chemist raised this pad, and pressed his face close to the little pane of glass.

He was enabled to see all down the road.

A smile crossed his withered countenance whenever he saw a person drop back and give up the pursuit.

It soon became evident that the coach was driven towards the open country at a tolerably swift rate, in order to get rid of all followers.

As we have said, then, the old chemist at last had the satisfaction of perceiving the last man give up the chase.

He removed his face from the pane of glass, and sat down.

The body of Jack Sheppard had been shaken off the seat by the jolting motion, and now lay at the bottom of the vehicle.

The chemist stooped and picked him up with an ease which showed that he possessed thrice the amount of strength that he appeared to do.

He placed him in a convenient position on the opposite seat, and having done so, he muttered:

"I fancy I shall succeed this time, for life does not seem to be extinct."

Then, looking out of the window, he saw that they were travelling rapidly along the high-road.

The driver had evidently received his instructions as to what he should do.

After going some distance further, he turned off down a narrow lane.

It was an unfrequented one.

From the time they turned the corner to the time when they pulled up they did not catch sight of a single living creature.

The coach stopped somewhat suddenly in this lane.

The driver got down off the box, and opened the door.

The chemist alighted and closed the door again, leaving Jack Sheppard the sole inmate of the interior of the coach.

CHAPTER CCCCXLVI.

THE GERMAN CHEMIST HAS THE BODY OF JACK SHEPPARD CARRIED INTO HIS LABORATORY.

"Be as quick as you can," said the German chemist, addressing himself to the driver of the hackney-coach; "the sooner we get back the better."

"All right, sir!"

The coach had been drawn up close to a pond which was by the side of the lane.

It was a good large sheet of clear water, and was not fenced off in any way.

The driver then seized his horse by the bridle, and very deliberately backed the hackney-coach into the pool.

Then from under his seat on the box he produced a large soft brush and a tin can, as well as some dry rags.

With the aid of the can, the brush, and the water, he set to work with great diligence to clean the vehicle.

The alteration thus effected was incredible.

From a worn-out, dirty-looking hackney-coach, it was gradually transformed into a neat and almost new private carriage.

In fact, the vehicle had been disguised by having dirt of all kinds splashed upon it.

All that we are now describing had been prearranged by the chemist, and formed part of his plan.

The man worked with good will.

The dirt upon the carriage was easily removed.

Then with his rags he polished it up until it looked like new.

When he had finished, no one would have dreamed that it was the same carriage.

But he had not yet done.

He next turned his attention to the horse and harness, and effected almost as great a change in these.

The object of all these proceedings must be obvious to the reader.

It was to destroy all clue as to what became of Jack Sheppard, and to prevent any identification of himself with what had taken place.

It must be conceded that the means taken were well calculated to effect the end in view.

At last the carriage and horse were shorn of their disguise, and presented their ordinary and proper appearance.

The vehicle was drawn into its proper position in the lane.

Then the driver took off the long white duffel coat, with its innumerable capes, in which he had been enveloped, and appeared dressed in a suit of dark livery.

His hat he put under the box, from which receptacle he produced another with gold lace round it.

The transformation was complete.

"Are you all ready, Ludwig?" said the chemist.

"Quite ready."

"Drive on, then."

The German chemist once more entered the carriage, while Ludwig, as he had called the driver, drove on.

He continued along the lane in the same direction.

But if any person had observed the equipage enter the lane, and then have seen it emerge, they would never have believed it was the same.

In a little while the carriage reached the Great North Road leading from London.

Along this they proceeded in the direction of the metropolis.

It was beginning to grow dusk.

The events which we have lately described of necessity occupied a great deal of time, and the chemist felt sure that it would be quite dark by the time he reached his own residence in Long Acre.

It now became necessary for him to make some changes in his own attire.

In the first place, he took off his very peculiar-looking conical hat.

He rolled this up into as small a compass as he could, and put it into his pocket.

Then he divested himself of his cloak.

It was a very large one.

He carefully enveloped the body of Jack Sheppard in it.

Not long after he had effected this alteration, the carriage stopped before his own door.

The chemist glanced up and down the street.

It was dark, but yet the hour was not late enough to cause it to be deserted.

Grasping a key in one hand, the chemist took up the body of Jack Sheppard and flung it over his shoulder.

As though the weight had been nothing, the chemist walked from the door of the carriage to the door of his own house.

The driver descended from his seat, closed the carriage door, and reseating himself, drove off.

The chemist thrust the key into the lock of the shop door, and was inside his own house in an instant.

He locked the door behind him.

Then crossing the shop, he entered the room at the back.

Blueskin sprang forward.

His countenance was careworn and anxious.

What anxiety he had suffered during the many hours he had been left alone in the chemist's gloomy habitation, the reader may perhaps be able to imagine.

To him each minute had seemed an hour.

Anxiously he listened to every sound, in the hope that it was the chemist returning.

But the day faded and night came.

What could be the reason of his absence he could not think.

He was worked up to the utmost pitch when he heard the welcome sound which indicated the arrival of the chemist.

"Well," he said, eagerly—"what success?"

"The best!"

The chemist staggered forward with his burden.

Blueskin looked upon it with a strange, shuddering sensation.

"Is—is—that——"

"That's it," said the chemist.

As he spoke, he placed the body in an arm-chair.

Blueskin felt as though changed to stone.

He could not move or speak.

"We must have a light before we can do any good," said the German chemist, in the same matter-of-fact, unconcerned tone which he would have made use of had he been talking about some ordinary every-day affair—"we must have a light."

He glided across the dark room, and ignited a large swinging lamp which hung from the ceiling.

The light was dim at first, but it soon became brilliant enough to illuminate every corner of the room.

With a kind of fascination, Blueskin's eyes were fixed upon the body of Jack Sheppard.

It was but little that he could see, however, for the cloak was wrapped entirely round it.

Still the outlines could be traced, and it was easy to imagine the rest.

With a coolness and ease which presented a very remarkable contrast to Blueskin's manner, the chemist approached the chair.

He turned back the cloak, and then the body was disclosed seated in the chair in a huddled-up posture.

Blueskin shuddered again, and averted his eyes in horror.

The countenance was horribly distorted and discoloured. It was, in fact, a dusky black, while the tongue, swollen to thrice its usual size, protruded from the purple lips.

And the eyes!

§ Their expression was too terrible for us to describe.

With a great effort Blueskin mastered his emotions.

In a broken voice he said:

"And is this Jack?—is this what they have made of him?"

"It is!"

"Is there any hope?"

"Of his recovery?"

"Yes."

"I think I may with safety say there is; but I must be speedy, though!"

As he spoke, the German chemist rang a bell.

A young, pale-faced man, and evidently a countryman of his own, obeyed the summons.

Blueskin started, for he had been under the impression that he had the house all to himself.

The chemist addressed this young man in German.

"Is the warm bath ready, Karl?"

"Quite, sir; it has been waiting for some time."

"Very good. And all the other preparations are made?"

"All, sir."

"Carry the patient with you, and place him in the bath. Keep him in ten minutes, then come to me and let me know the result."

The young man did not attempt to carry Jack, but, in quite as unconcerned a manner as his master, went to the chair and wheeled it out of the room.

The door closed behind him.

"And you think there is a chance of his being restored to life?"

"I do."

"I trust I shall not be disappointed."

"I would not build too much upon the hope, then, for these are but doubtful affairs at the best. Still, I have succeeded when there has been less chance of doing so than on the present occasion."

"Then there is some consolation to be derived from that?"

"Yes."

"And now that you have put me at ease upon this point, allay my curiosity by informing me how it was you managed to gain possession of the body."

"I see no reason why I should keep that information from you."

"Pray tell me, then! I am chiefly anxious to know how you dealt with Jonathan Wild."

"It so happened, then, that I had no trouble with him, for as soon as ever the execution was over he seemed anxious to get back to London. He waited to see the body cut down and put into the cart, and then he hurried away."

"That was fortunate for you."

"Very!"

The German chemist then gave a brief account of all that he had done.

We need not repeat his words, because the reader is already acquainted with the substance of what he said.

Blueskin was filled with admiration when his strange companion fully unfolded the details of the clever scheme he had so quickly elaborated, and which had been crowned with such unequivocal success.

Just as he had finished, there came a faint tap-tap at the door.

"Enter!" said the chemist, in German.

The pale-faced assistant made his appearance.

"The patient has been ten minutes in the warm bath," he said.

"And the result—is it favourable?"

The assistant shook his head.

"My presence is needed!"

Then, turning to Blueskin, the chemist said:

"Will you remain here? You can accompany me if you like, or stay here, just as you please."

"I will accompany you, then."

"It will not be a pleasant sight."

"I know that, but while I am with you, observing all that is going on, I shall not feel so much suspense."

"Come, then, for every moment is of value."

The assistant held open the door to allow Blueskin and his master to pass.

Our old friend looked about him with the greatest curiosity, and yet he felt more like a man in a dream than aught else.

He could scarcely bring himself to believe in the reality of what was going forward.

So continuous had been the succession of events that he had been unable to recover from the first shock which the intelligence caused him.

And now, as he followed that strange being, the German chemist, along a dimly-lighted passage, he found himself asking the question, "Can all this be real?"

Well might he ask such a question under such circumstances, and with two such extraordinary beings as the German chemist and his assistant in company with him.

All seemed unreal.

The passage seemed to lead in the direction of the back of the premises.

At length a door was pushed open.

Blueskin crossed the threshold quickly, for he was impatient to see what was beyond.

It was a large, well-lighted chamber.

The atmosphere in it seemed loaded with oppressive odours, which had at first an almost overpowering effect upon anyone who entered.

Blueskin was susceptible to its influence, but the curiosity he felt with respect to the fate of Jack Sheppard so absorbed him that he quickly forgot all about it.

His state was critical in the extreme.

The German chemist had expressed a certain amount of confidence in the result, but then he might be deceived.

At any rate, it was doubtful whether Jack Sheppard would or would not recover.

CHAPTER CCCCXLVII.

THE EXPERIMENTS OF THE GERMAN CHEMIST ARE CROWNED WITH A SUCCESSFUL TERMINATION.

THE chamber which Blueskin entered was fitted up as a laboratory.

Apparatus of every conceivable description was piled up on all sides—things which Blueskin had never seen before, and the use of which he could not conjecture.

Upon these curious articles, however, he bestowed much less attention than he would have done upon almost any other occasion.

The one subject which occupied his mind, to the exclusion of all others, was the fate of Jack Sheppard.

He had to make use of some caution in following the German chemist through the maze of crucibles and alembics with which the chamber was strewn.

His strange guide led the way to the furthest extremity of the room.

Upon approaching it, Blueskin saw a large bath, almost as large as an Egyptian sarcophagus.

Underneath this was a fire, upon an iron grating. The coals were spread evenly upon it, and the grating was so constructed that it could be raised or lowered at pleasure.

By this means the amount of heat could be regulated to a nicety.

It was with a strange, undefinable sensation that Blueskin followed the German chemist to the side of this bath.

He did so, and looked in.

The bath was about three parts filled with water.

At the upper end there was a large thermometer, the base of which was immersed in the water.

The chemist gave one glance at Jack Sheppard, and then went towards this instrument, in order to ascertain the precise temperature which the water had reached.

As may be readily supposed, Blueskin's chief attention was given to his comrade.

Jack lay upon his back in the bath.

There were no more signs of life about him than there were at first.

The only difference was that the features were not quite so discoloured and distorted.

Having noted the precise temperature of the water, the chemist took from his assistant, who had held it in readiness, a peculiar-looking tube.

It was made of wood, and was in shape more like a conch shell than aught else.

The larger end of this instrument the chemist carefully placed just over Jack's heart.

Then, holding up his hand for silence, the chemist placed the small end to his ear and listened.

That was an anxious moment to Blueskin.

The chemist listened for a long, long time.

Blueskin noticed that his eyes were all the while turned in one direction.

He looked to see what it was at which the chemist was gazing.

He saw that it was a clock, the face of which was let into the wall.

This Blueskin had not noticed until now.

Having listened for a certain time, the chemist raised his head.

"What is the result?" Blueskin asked.

"There is no pulsation at the heart as yet."

"But will there be?"

"I hope so, though there are no signs at present. This instrument is a sound magnifier, and by the aid of it I could distinguish the feeblest fluttering about the organ of life."

He made a sign to his assistant while he spoke.

"The temperature must be raised at least ten degrees," he said. "We shall see what results that will produce."

The assistant, by the aid of some simple mechanism, raised the grating upon which the burning coals were laid until it was only about six inches from the bottom of the bath.

All fixed their eyes upon the thermometer.

We have said it was on a large scale, and no doubt it registered the heat with great precision.

The tube containing the mercury was of great thickness, and the mercury itself was coloured red.

By this means, its rise in the tube could be more readily distinguished.

The tube was placed upon a piece of bright polished metal, upon which the degrees were marked.

Each degree was divided and subdivided into quarters.

The mercury rose in the tube with rapidity.

"A little lower," said the chemist, "or the heat will be raised above the ten degrees."

The assistant lowered the grating in an instant, and the rapid ascent of the mercury was checked.

At last, the required point of temperature was reached.

The water was kept at this heat for several minutes.

Then the chemist took the tube and listened again.

This time, Blueskin watched him with greater anxiousness than before.

But the inscrutable face of the German chemist afforded no index as to the state of affairs.

At length he raised his head.

This time, Blueskin was too much affected to speak.

"There is no pulsation!" said the chemist, slowly.

"Consequently, no hope!"

"I do not say that!" he answered, quickly—"I have

succeeded in far more desperate cases than this. I always make use of the mildest remedies first."

"And they have failed!"

"The bath has—at least, I can raise the temperature five degrees; let us try that!" he added to his assistant.

The grating was slightly elevated.

"I dare not raise the temperature beyond that point, or it will scald him."

This seemed a desperate remedy.

At least, Blueskin thought so, and wondered to himself what others the chemist practised.

The required point was reached.

The chemist listened again.

Then raised his head.

"This is no good!" he said—"I must resort to more powerful means at once, or we shall fail altogether!"

"No—no!"

"I fear so! Such a warmth as that ought to have restored animation!"

Blueskin wrung his hands.

The German chemist turned to his assistant.

"Where is the other apparatus?"

"All is in readiness."

"That is well! Lift him from the bath, wrap him in a blanket, and lay him at full length upon the dissecting-table!"

The assistant set about obeying his instructions.

"The dissecting-table?" said Blueskin. "Surely you—"

"No—no! Be under no apprehension! I ought, however, to tell you that, if the means I am about to try should fail, there will be an end to all hope!"

"But it will succeed?"

"I hope so!"

"Only hope?"

"I cannot say more. I was of opinion that the hot bath would be sufficient, and that there would be no need for me to resort to such means as I am now about to try."

At this moment, the assistant carried the body of Jack Sheppard, wrapped in blankets, and placed it upon a long stone-topped table in the laboratory, which was used for the purpose of making experiments in dissection.

The German chemist followed his attendant.

The body was quickly placed at full length upon the table.

With a choking sensation in his throat, Blueskin gazed upon the remains of the youth for whom he had felt so strong an affection.

The German chemist was as cool and collected now as he was at the first, although he knew that everything depended upon this second experiment.

Blueskin trembled and shook like a leaf in a storm.

The pale-faced assistant, too, seemed to look upon all the proceedings as a matter of business.

Still, though he was so calm and quiet, he was deeply interested in all that was going forward, for he had been too long in his present situation not to feel the greatest possible interest in the success of all chemical experiments.

Blueskin forgot that the two men by the side of whom he stood were used to handling the human body after death.

With what suspenseful eagerness Blueskin watched all the rest of the chemist's movements the reader will be able to imagine.

He could not understand all that was done.

Both the chemist and his assistant were for several moments busily engaged in moving and placing various articles.

One of these was so singular in its appearance as to attract a great deal of Blueskin's attention.

It was a large glass cylinder, supported on two upright pieces of wood, and furnished with a handle, by means of which the cylinder could be made to revolve with great rapidity.

Blueskin had never seen anything resembling it in his life before, and therefore could not tell that it was an electrical machine.

At the time of which we write, electricity had not reached the perfection it now has. Then it was in its infancy.

Electrical machines were scarcely known even to the votaries of the science.

It is, however, a fact that about the period at which the action of our tale takes place, the Germans paid particular attention to this attractive science.

As a matter of course, this application had the effect of causing them to make many discoveries in advance of others.

For the German chemist electricity had a remarkable fascination.

He made some experiments with it which had produced some surprising results; but, like many other discoverers of important secrets, he kept his knowledge to himself, and made use of it for his own purposes.

He placed his apparatus all in order, and then, when all things were in readiness, he set his attendant to turn the handle.

The cylinder soon revolved with great velocity.

Blueskin thought he observed everything narrowly, but he grew confused until he saw the German chemist with something in his hand which looked like a piece of thick brass wire.

With this he touched Jack Sheppard.

A sudden contraction of the whole body was the result, and then, with an unearthly yell upon his lips, Jack Sheppard sprang up to a sitting posture.

Although prepared for his restoration to life, Blueskin did not think it would take place in so startling and horrible a manner.

Without exactly thinking anything about it, he had fancied that the return to life would be gradual.

As it was, it was as sudden as its extinction.

"That is over!" said the chemist, as he dropped the piece of brass wire.

The assistant ceased turning the handle.

The cry which came from Jack Sheppard's lips was such a one as had never assailed Blueskin's ears before, and such as he fondly hoped would never assail them again.

Immediately after uttering this cry, Jack Sheppard fell backwards on the stone slab, as though entirely bereft of life.

So suddenly did this happen, and so soon was it over, that Blueskin could almost have fancied it was imagination merely, and that the body which was now so still had never moved.

The ejaculation of the chemist was one of great satisfaction, for towards the last he had grown very doubtful about the issue of his experiment.

Blueskin turned towards him.

"What—what was that?" he said.

His very lips were white as he asked the question.

"I have succeeded!"

"Is it possible?"

"It is true."

"And that cry?"

"Was his return to life."

"And he is really alive once more?"

"As much as you yourself are."

Blueskin wept like a child.

"He is in a kind of swoon now," said the chemist; "but from that I can recover him, and the rest of my task will be easy."

He turned to his assistant, and added:

"Remove the apparatus, and carry him again to the bath."

This was done.

In a state of perfect insensibility Jack Sheppard was replaced in the bath.

Its temperature had now much diminished, and the chemist gave instructions for it to be gradually raised.

More fuel was placed upon the grating, and the water soon acquired an augmented heat.

At the expiration of about ten minutes a gentle sigh came from Jack Sheppard's lips.

He opened his eyes then, and gazed wonderingly about him.

"Is this death?" he said.

The voice in which he spoke was a hollow murmur.

CHAPTER CCCCXVIII.

JACK SHEPPARD IS ONCE MORE RESTORED TO LIFE AND ANIMATION.

"AM I dead?" asked Jack Sheppard, as his eyes rolled wonderingly over the strange objects by which he was surrounded.

"You are not dead," said the German chemist, advancing, and at the same time motioning for Blueskin to keep out of Jack Sheppard's sight, lest the sudden and unexpected recognition should be too much for him.

"You are not dead!"

"Is this a dream?"

"Yes, if you like to think so. Above all things, keep still. Do not move, and it will be better if you do not speak."

Jack Sheppard closed his eyes and became perfectly still.

It was evident that he was endeavouring to recollect what had happened last.

The German chemist whispered to Blueskin:

"It will be better for you to keep out of his sight for a moment or so. The sudden sight of you may prove too much for him."

Blueskin obeyed.

A shudder swept over Jack's frame, and then he opened his eyes.

A wild, scared look was on his face.

"I—I—I have been——"

"Never mind that just at present," said the German chemist, with quiet firmness. "I require the whole of your attention. We will talk about all other matters presently."

Jack's mind was in as feeble a state as his body, and he suffered himself to be ruled without opposition.

By the assistance of the German chemist and the young man he was lifted from the bath, rolled up in blankets, and carried to a bed-room.

Here every preparation had been made.

Wrapped in the blankets just as he was, Jack Sheppard was placed in the bed.

The German chemist again addressed him.

"Speak," he said, "and, as you value your life, speak truthfully. Do you feel inclined to sleep?"

"I do—I do! My eyelids seem like lead!"

"Give way to the feeling, then, as much as you can. When you wake up it will be time for you to think."

The last words reached Jack's ears in an indistinct manner.

In another moment he was sound asleep.

"You will watch him, Carl," said the chemist to his assistant.

"I will."

"And should there be cause, you will summon me."

"Yes, sir."

The chemist went towards the door.

On the threshold stood Blueskin, his countenance wearing a mingled expression of hope and fear.

The chemist placed his finger on his lip, and then beckoned to Blueskin to enter.

His gesture was willingly obeyed.

"He sleeps," said the chemist, in a whisper. "Look at him, but speak not."

He led Blueskin to the side of the bed.

It could be seen at a glance that Jack was sleeping calmly and quietly.

Blueskin gazed upon him with moistened eyes.

He could scarcely believe his old comrade was restored to him.

Doubtless he would have stood gazing for a considerable length of time, but the chemist drew him gently away.

They descended the stairs and entered the room at the back of the shop.

From a small cupboard the chemist produced some choice spirits, and desired Blueskin to drink.

Our old friend was nothing loth, for what he had gone through was almost too much for him.

"You see I have been successful," said the chemist, after a pause.

"You have, and my heart is once more at ease. What will be Wild's feelings when he finds he has, after all, been balked of his revenge!"

"Were I in your place, I should carefully keep all such knowledge from him. That, however, remains for you and your comrade to consider."

"Yes, yes!"

"By to-morrow I fancy there will not be much the matter with him."

"Will he recover so soon?"

"I think so."



[JACK SHEPPARD ATTENDS HIS OWN FUNERAL.]

"You take a load off my heart."

"If you will take my advice, you will put off till to-morrow any further consultation. You will be calmer and better, and by the look of your eyes I can tell you are sadly in need of rest."

"I am—I am! It is a long time since I had any sleep."

"Go, then—go at once! You can sleep in peace. You have nothing whatever to fear from your foes."

"I believe you, and I trust you."

"You will not be betrayed."

"I feel convinced of that."

The old chemist rang a bell, and bade the servant who appeared in answer to the summons to show Blueskin to a bed-room.

As he had said, a long time had elapsed since Blueskin had taken any rest, and he felt the want of sleep severely.

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He had every confidence in the old chemist's good faith, and he threw himself down upon the bed with a feeling of comfort which he had for a long time been a stranger to.

But ere he closed his eyes in slumber, although he was so very, very weary, his thoughts reverted to Edgworth Bess and her new-found friend Ned Cantle.

He wondered in what circumstances they were placed. Upon this point he could, of course, come to no conclusion whatever.

But had he given himself up to the wildest speculations, he would never have made any approach to the truth.

As soon as we can, it is our intention to return to the heroine of our story, and relate how her evil fortune followed her across the ocean to a foreign land.

For the present, however, we would wish to devote our attention to Jack Sheppard.

It was late the next morning when Blueskin awoke, and although he had slumbered so many hours, yet it seemed to him as though he had only just closed his eyes and opened them again.

His first inquiry was concerning Jack Sheppard.

"He has recovered more rapidly than I could possibly have imagined," replied the chemist. "He has just woke up. In a little while you shall see him. Remain here while I go and visit him. I have here in this bottle a cordial of most rare virtues; it is, indeed, the essence of life itself—the true *elixir vite*. You shall see the wonderful effects that will follow its administration."

So saying the chemist left the room, after having first invited Blueskin to partake of the breakfast that was spread upon the table.

He was absent for some time.

As soon as he returned Blueskin started to his feet.

The chemist, with a smile, motioned to him to reseal himself.

"He is asleep again," he said, "and must not be disturbed. This sleep is doing him more good than all the drugs in the world possibly could. When he wakes we shall see a wonderful improvement."

Many hours passed—long hours they seemed to Blueskin, who sat watching and waiting in that gloomy little room behind the shop.

Towards afternoon Blueskin was startled by hearing the door open.

He turned round quickly, and then uttered a cry.

It was Jack Sheppard who had entered.

Blueskin, as soon as he recovered from his surprise, sprang from his chair and grasped him by the hand.

Jack was ghastly pale.

He seemed weak and feeble, too, and it was but a faint smile that came to his lips.

Round his neck was an ominous dark mark.

The mark where the hangman's rope had been.

"Thank heaven!" said Blueskin, "you are once more restored to life, and the villanous thief-taker is defeated!"

"Thank you, my faithful friend," said Jack, sinking into a chair. "Had it not been for your aid I should by this time have been with the dead! But first of all—speak—tell me—where is Edgworth Bess?"

"All in good time, Jack! I have much to tell you!"

"And I the same; but tell me about her first, and then you can tell all other events in their natural order."

Blueskin felt that it would be wisest for him to indulge Jack in this wish.

The consequences of too much anxiety or suspense would probably be very serious.

Accordingly, as briefly as he could, he explained the circumstance of his apparent desertion of him (Jack), and removed from his mind any doubts that might have lingered there concerning it.

This done, he proceeded to relate the whole of their adventures on the river and the ocean, up to the point where we left them in Amsterdam.

"Then she is there still?" said Jack.

"Yes; and Ned Cantle is with her to shield her from all harm!"

"That takes a heavy load off my mind, Blueskin. And now as to yourself, and what happened to you after your arrival in London. How came I here? Who are those strange men?"

"I will tell you all, Jack, from first to last, and then you will fully understand everything."

"It will be the best."

Blueskin then related all those strange circumstances which have already been placed at full length before the reader.

"Wonderful!" said Jack, when he had finished. "And I have been so close to death?"

"You have indeed!"

"I shall always shudder now when I think upon the past!"

"Pho—pho! the keenness of the recollection will, of course, wear off in time."

"I fear not!"

"Do not talk about that."

"But I cannot banish it from my thoughts!"

"You must try."

"But the awful moment when the cart was drawn from under my feet is ever before me! It was terrible! But how is it that life was not extinguished?"

"I cannot tell."

"I ask, because I remember now what Jack Ketch said to me!"

"Said to you?"

"Yes; he told me I should die hard! That I was not heavy enough to draw the rope sufficiently tight around my neck to strangle me!"

"Horrible! Did he say that to you?"

"Yes; and more!"

"What?"

"He said, as I should die so hard, he would hold on by my legs, and so put me out of my misery!"

It was Blueskin's turn to shudder now.

"I thought of his words when I felt the cart moving. Oh, the agony of that moment! I tried with all my might to cling to the cart with my feet to stop the slow but sure progress of the vehicle!"

"Do not think of it."

"There is not much more to tell you. Although I made these unavailing efforts to keep the cart from sliding away from under me, I still recollected the hangman's words. I made up my mind not to struggle!"

"Not to struggle?"

"No; but to remain perfectly still, for then I thought I should miss the little attentions which he had promised to pay me!"

"I see."

"Accordingly I made the effort. But when I descended with that fearful jerk I forgot my resolution. It seemed as though my head had been torn off! I struggled furiously. But, even in that awful moment, I recollected my intention! I strove to keep still! I strove to stiffen my limbs! I succeeded—I am sure that I succeeded—but after I had done so I became unconscious of everything!"

"It is an awful thing to talk about!"

"It is; and still more awful to endure!"

"Right! After ceasing your struggles, do you recollect anything?"

"Nothing except a sharp pain which shot through me with the swiftness of a lightning's flash. I cried out, and started up."

"And what then?"

"I recollect nothing until I awoke in the bath."

"And the rest you can remember?"

"Oh, yes."

At this moment there came a faint tap-tap at the door.

"Who is there?" asked Blueskin.

There was no reply, but the door was slowly opened.

The German chemist entered, and closed the door behind him.

When he looked round, our two friends saw that there was an anxious, uneasy expression upon his countenance, as though something amiss had happened.

CHAPTER CCCCXLIX.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD SWEAR TO BE REVENGED UPON JONATHAN WILD.

BOTH Blueskin and Jack Sheppard turned round and gazed inquiringly into the countenance of the German chemist.

"You have bad news," they said.

"Not particularly bad," was the reply.

"What is it, then?"

"Why, I find my little adventure with the sheriff has raised quite a commotion. They thought at first he was mad, but it was soon found that the order which he had written had been made use of, and that the body had been carried off, no one knows where."

"Indeed! Then I guess your fear, and the cause of your uneasiness."

"What is it?"

"Your fear that suspicion will be raised as to what has become of the body."

"Right!"

"What is to be done?"

"That, I think, we had better consider about."

"With all my heart!"

"In the first place, then," said the German chemist, "I ought to tell you that the popular impression is that Jack's body has been claimed by some of his friends for private interment. Consequently a look-out is being kept upon all the grave-yards."

"That is very awkward."

"Very, indeed, for, you see, if he is not buried, great curiosity will be felt upon the matter, and the subject would keep alive for some time, as such ruptures always do!"

"What is to be done?"

"What can you propose?"

"I don't know."

"We can't bury him."

"I should strongly object to such a proceeding," said Jack.

"Of course you would."

"But if Jack is not buried," said Blueskin, "you think the whole affair will become the town's talk?"

"Yes; an inquiry would undoubtedly be set on foot, and that inquiry might result in a discovery of the resuscitation."

"I had not thought of this difficulty."

"Nor had I taken it into my calculations. In fact, I should not have thought about it at all had not circumstances pressed it upon me."

"It is very serious, and at the same time it is very fortunate that you should have acquired the intelligence."

The chemist smiled.

"That is true, and I had the information from a sure source."

"But," said Jack, "what will be the best thing for me to do?"

"I cannot tell."

"Shall I escape at once?"

"Perhaps that would be best."

"I don't think so," said Blueskin.

"But what else can be done?"

"I don't know. Something better than that."

The chemist reflected for an instant.

"It seems to me," he said, "that the best thing would be to bury Jack Sheppard."

"Unquestionably, only the worst of it is such a thing is impossible."

"I don't know that."

"Do you mean it would be the best plan to cause the impression to be felt that Jack was buried?"

"I do."

"Then you would have a mock funeral?"

"There could be nothing better."

"The only objection I can see is as to how such a thing could be managed?"

"Do you mean," said Jack Sheppard, "that you would bury some one else, and make the people believe it was me?"

"Well, not exactly that," returned the German chemist.

"I apprehend an empty coffin would answer the purpose quite as well as a full one."

"Of course it would!"

"You must see at once that if we could only induce the people to believe that Jack Sheppard was buried, there would be an end of all trouble."

"And I should be much safer from detection!" said Jack.

"Certainly you would."

"It's an object well worth striving for, and I hope it will be accomplished."

"So do I; and if we set our wits to work, I can't help thinking that we must succeed."

"We have been successful so far!" said Blueskin, "and in comparison with what we have done, this seems a very simple affair."

"It does, and yet its simplicity makes it difficult!" said the chemist.

"How so?"

"Why, we must contrive the mock funeral in such a manner, that there must be no doubt raised as to the fact that it is Jack Sheppard who is buried."

"I confess I can't see my way very clear at present. If we can get over this, the rest will be easy enough."

"It appears to me," said Jack, after a long pause, "that it could be done in this manner."

"How, how?"

"In the first place, can you procure an empty coffin?"

"Oh, yes! I've got one in the house."

"Eh?"

"I've got one in the house!"

"That's rather a strange article of furniture, is it not?"

"Well, one might consider it so!" said the chemist,

coolly, "but the fact is, I have generally one or two by me."

"For such purposes as the present?"

"Oh, no, I never thought of a mock burial before! I keep them for my subjects after I have dissected them."

"Oh, yes, I understand!" said Jack, with a shudder.

He could not help thinking what a narrow escape he had had from some doctor's scalpel.

"Don't let that trouble you, then!" added the chemist.

"I can provide a coffin. And now tell us what you were going to propose?"

"Nothing more than this. What is there to prevent all three of us going to the nearest church, and represent ourselves as the surviving relations and friends of the deceased Jack Sheppard?"

"All three?"

"Yes! Why not? What I propose is practical, is it not?"

"Quite so!"

"Very well! Let us go to the vicar with the coffin, and ask him to bury it."

"He would refuse!"

"You don't know; and if he did he would be sure to speak of the application, and then the people would be impressed with the idea that I am dead."

"You are quite right Jack," said the chemist.

"That is what we want to do, is it not?"

"Yes, if we can only make the people believe you are dead all will be well."

"Then let us pay a visit to some parsonage at once. You don't know—we might succeed in getting him to bury the coffin!"

"We might! But do you still think of going yourself?"

"Yes! Why shouldn't I?"

"But are you strong enough?"

"Yes—quite!"

"But, Jack!" said Blueskin, "don't you think you will be running a very great, and very unnecessary risk?"

"No. Not any more than I shall be obliged to run! I can disguise myself, and on such an errand as that, who would think of looking for me?"

"Well, no one, I should think, without they raised the lid of the coffin, and looked inside!"

"Very well, then! I think that settles the matter at once, and I shall do what very few people have ever done."

"What is that?"

"Attend my own funeral!"

"It is a strange idea, Jack, but you were always full of them."

"I think it is a very good one," said the chemist. "I can furnish him with a disguise, and I really do think that we cannot do better than try to carry out his plan."

"I am agreed, then," said Blueskin, to whom these last words had been addressed.

"The matter is settled, then?"

"Yes, quite."

"I am glad of that."

"No doubt. I will go now and make the necessary arrangements. In the meantime, you can converse at your ease."

With these words the chemist left the apartment.

"This is a strange whim of yours, Jack," said Blueskin.

"It is, I own, but I shall have to leave this house some time or other, and what better opportunity could be afforded than the present?"

"Perhaps none."

"There could be none better, and, as I said before, the risk will be trifling to a degree, for who would dream that I should set out upon such an errand?"

"No one at all, and I fancy yours is the only mind that such an idea could ever have entered into."

Jack smiled.

"I want now," he said, "as we shall have a few moments to ourselves, to talk of the subject which is nearest my heart."

"What about it, Jack?"

"Well, when I leave this house, of course, I should never think of returning to it."

"What would you do?—where would you go?"

"That is just what I want to talk about."

"But do you think you are strong enough to bear any exertion?"

"With such an object as I have in view, I could endure any amount."

"You must not rely too much upon your strength yet, Jack. You may fancy yourself stronger than you are."

"No—no."

"Tell me, then, what you want to do. I could hazard a guess."

"No doubt a correct one. I propose that as soon as we have settled matters with the chemist, we make immediate preparations to leave England."

"I consent to that."

"So far, then, all is well. Of course you understand that we make our way at once to that place where you say Edgworth Bess is to be found?"

"Certainly!"

"Then, when we are all united, we can hold a full and proper consultation as to what had best be done for the future."

"With all my heart! And Jonathan Wild?"

"I shall not forget him, you may feel assured of that!"

A malignant look came over Jack's face.

"I feel sure you will not forget him, nor shall I."

"I prophesied many a time that I should live to see the last of him, and I feel sure of it now!"

"We will yet make him regret what he has done."

"We will, Blueskin. Give me your hand."

"Here it is! What do you want?"

Jack Sheppard grasped the hand that was stretched out to him.

"I want you to take an oath!"

"To what?"

"That, when we have seen Edgworth Bess righted, you will join with me, body and soul, and use all your efforts towards the accomplishment of one object!"

"And that object—?"

"The overthrow of Jonathan Wild! I want you to swear that you will aid me to have my revenge upon him!"

"I swear that willingly! I intended to be revenged myself!"

"Then we shall both be working to one end."

"We shall. And what shall be your revenge?"

"To put the officers of justice on his track—to hunt him down ourselves, and never rest until——"

"Until when?"

"Until his body swings from one of the cross-beams of Tyburn Tree!"

"You could not have devised a more suitable revenge! If I could see him hang at Tyburn, I should feel that we were quits."

"And I, too, then! I should be even with him for what he has made me suffer. It would be retribution, indeed, to bring him to that gallows to which he has been the means of bringing so many innocent persons!"

"When we have righted the poor heiress——"

"Then, Blueskin, we will live for one object, and one object alone, and that is—the destruction of Jonathan Wild! We will never pause or tire until we have succeeded in bringing him to Tyburn!"

"Jack Sheppard—I swear to devote myself, body and soul, to the accomplishment of this purpose—the destruction of Jonathan Wild!"

CHAPTER CCCL.

JACK SHEPPARD ATTENDS HIS OWN FUNERAL IN SAINT MARTIN'S CHURCHYARD.

THERE could be little doubt that the vow thus made would be faithfully kept.

We shall see, however, in the progress of the tale, what kind of success attended their efforts.

Before they had time to utter another syllable, the door was opened, and the German chemist made his appearance.

"What success?"

"All is ready."

"Is it late enough to start?"

"Quite, I think."

"And my disguise?" said Jack.

"It is here."

The chemist as he spoke handed to Jack Sheppard a long and ample cloak, and a steeple-crowned hat.

"Wrap the cloak closely around you," he said, "and

draw the hat down tightly over your brows, and you will be well enough disguised to escape recognition."

The cloak was one that had been long out of fashion. Still it would not make the wearer look conspicuous.

It completely enveloped Jack Sheppard's form, and effectually precluded all possibility of anyone succeeding in recognising his person.

Then the hat was one with a very broad brim, and this had the effect of casting a shadow over his countenance.

"You will do, Jack," said Blueskin. "I should not be afraid of anyone recognising you now—that is, of course, provided they had no suspicion of your being alive."

"And if they had," said the chemist, "it would be difficult—very difficult."

"Do you think so?"

"I do, and I will tell you why. Jack is disguised without appearing to be so."

"So he is."

"And people would imagine he would be careful to make himself look as different as possible. Now, they would never dream he would go out with a cloak and hat on as an ordinary individual would."

"You are right," said Blueskin; "and when I want to disguise myself again I shall bear in mind what you have just said."

"The hint may prove of value."

"I am sure it will."

"Did you say all was ready?" asked Jack.

"Yes."

"And I am waiting. Don't you think we had better start at once?"

"Decidedly."

The chemist led the way to the private door at the side of the shop.

Opposite this a carriage was drawn up.

It was the same one that had been used on a former occasion, and Ludwig was seated on the box.

"Cross over quickly and seat yourselves," said the chemist, "and yet do so in a manner that will betray neither hurry nor confusion."

Our friends obeyed.

In another instant all were seated, and Ludwig set the carriage in motion.

The vehicle contained, besides its living inmates, a coffin.

This ghastly object was rendered still more ghastly by being enveloped in a black cloth.

"What church have you made your mind up to go to?"

"St. Martin's."

"In St. Martin's Lane?"

"Yes."

"That is very close."

"I know that."

"Why do you choose that?"

"Because I know by repute that the rector is a charitable, kind man, and one who would be likely to perform such a service as that which we are now about to ask of him."

"Then let us make the attempt by all means."

"If we fail we can but go elsewhere."

"True."

The distance from the chemist's shop in Long Acre to St. Martin's church was very short.

At that time, the residence of the rector was near the church.

"Who will make the application to him?" said Jack.

"I will," said the chemist.

"I shall never be able to pay you for all that you have done in my behalf!"

"We will speak of that presently. Here we are."

The carriage stopped.

The old chemist alighted, and went towards the house.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard kept themselves well back in the carriage, so as to avoid as much as possible the notice of any casual passers-by.

But the hour was too late for many pedestrians to be abroad.

At the time of which we write, it was not safe to walk about London streets after nightfall.

Let us follow the old chemist.

He ascended the steps leading to the residence, and tapped at the door.

He was an adept at deception of every description was that old chemist.

It seemed to be a part of his nature.

By the contraction of a few muscles, he greatly altered the general appearance of his countenance.

Then with his hands he brought forward his beard and whiskers, so that the quantity of hair upon his face seemed nearly doubled.

In a usual way, he brushed the whiskers flat back; but, now that they were brought forward, the difference it made to his face was really striking.

By the time he had done this, his summons at the door was attended to.

Upon stating his wish to see the rector he was at once desired to enter, and then afterwards was ushered into a plainly-furnished room.

He had scarcely seated himself and considered what he should say, when the door was opened and the rector entered the room.

The chemist rose and made a low salutation, which the minister returned, at the same time desiring his visitor to be seated.

He was a fine, handsome, venerable man was the rector.

He was full of the milk of human kindness.

He had been imposed upon many a time through the goodness of his heart, and now he stood a fair chance of being imposed upon again.

The chemist assumed a doleful, lugubrious expression of countenance.

"Reverend sir," he said, "I come to ask your advice and help upon a very serious matter."

"I shall be glad to assist you to the utmost of my power," said the rector, in a gentle voice.

"Thanks, sir—many thanks!" said the chemist, in a voice which well corresponded with the countenance he had put on. "I have heard that you are always willing to assist those who come to you afflicted in mind and spirit."

"I hope I am," said the rector. "It is my duty."

"But how few there are that perform their duty as you do, reverend sir."

The rector was not insensible to flattery, and so, with a benign smile, he said:

"Go on, my good man, tell me what I can do for you!"

"I will come to the point at once, reverend sir, because, by so doing, I shall trespass less upon your valuable time."

"Proceed, I am all attention."

"Of course, then, reverend sir, you must be aware that a notorious malefactor named John Sheppard was executed at Tyburn yesterday?"

"I have heard of that occurrence."

"It may be, then, reverend sir, that you have also heard that the body of the culprit, after his execution, was obtained by his friends in a surreptitious and underhand manner?"

"I have heard of that too."

"It is about that matter that I wish to speak to you, reverend sir."

"But how can I serve you?"

"I will tell you. I have no doubt you think it was very wrong for anyone to obtain the body in such a manner."

"I am sure of it, for it was a fraud."

"But, reverend sir, when you hear the particulars you may perhaps look upon the act with a lenient eye. You must remember that, bad and evil as this young man was, he had relatives and friends who could not but feel the deepest grief for his awful and untimely fate."

"Of course—of course!"

"They might feel the greatest abhorrence for the crimes of which he had been found guilty; but, at the same time, they would not be able to stifle the love which it was only natural they should feel for him."

"Very true."

"They felt that he deserved his death—they considered that it was forfeited to his country—but they wished that his punishment should end with his death."

"End with his death? I do not understand you!"

"Permit me to explain. They wished to prevent any indignity from being wreaked upon his lifeless remains."

"What indignity do you mean?"

"Being hacked to pieces by the surgeon's knife, or hung up on a gibbet."

"I comprehend now, though I confess at first I did not." "Well, sir, you will be at no loss to understand that his friends would naturally shrink from this."

"Oh yes—yes!"

"And that they would do all they could to save him from such a fate."

"As you say, it would only be natural for them to do so."

"I am glad to obtain such an admission from you, and now I will go further, and tell you that, by adopting a clever scheme, Jack Sheppard's friends obtained possession of his dead body, and so saved it from further desecration."

"I have heard that by fraud they obtained possession of it."

"I grant it was a fraud, but do you not think the means in this case justified the end?"

The rector hesitated, and then said:

"What has all this to do with me? What service is it that you desire me to perform?"

"I am almost afraid to ask it, reverend sir."

"Nay, speak freely!"

"Well, sir, I will. Outside your house there is a hackney-coach. It contains a coffin, in which the body of Jack Sheppard has been placed; and it also contains his two only friends. Can you guess the favour that I came here to ask?"

"I would rather hear your request."

"Then I will be bold to make it."

"Do so!"

"I wish you to perform the burial rites over his body!"

"I cannot!"

"Nay—nay, sir, do not refuse!"

"I regret to do so—believe me I do—but my duty is clear before me. It is more than I dare do! I should call down upon myself the censure of my ecclesiastical superiors!"

"I am sorry to hear that, reverend sir!" said the chemist, humbly—"I hoped—"

"But I dare not do what you require!"

"Then I will press you no further."

"Could I do such a thing, I would most willingly!"

"I will go, then, sir!" said the chemist, preparing to take his departure—"and yet—"

"Yet what?"

"Could you, reverend sir, give me your advice?"

"Upon what point?"

"As I have told you, we have the body in the coach—how can we dispose of it? Will you assist us in this matter?—we wish to give his remains Christian burial!"

"I cannot assist you!"

"But can you tell us what we can do with the body?"

"Bury it!"

"But where, reverend sir?"

The rector was silent.

"I don't know where!" he said, at length.

"Reverend sir—!"

"Well?"

"I am very troublesome! But suppose, now, that we were to carry the coffin into your churchyard, and bury it—you would not interfere with us, would you?"

"I cannot give you my permission!"

"But you will just say nothing about it, will you not, reverend sir? You will not inform anyone of our intention?"

"I will not!"

"Nor cause us to be interrupted?"

"No!"

"Many thanks then, sir, for you have taken a heavy load off my heart! I was sorely troubled to know what to do with the dead body!"

"I know—I know! But, still, I cannot give you my permission! I am not bound to know what you are going to do!"

"I understand you, reverend sir; and I wish I had something more to offer you than mere thanks!"

"I require nothing more," said the rector, meekly.

CHAPTER CCCCLI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD GET ON BOARD THE DUTCH VESSEL OFF GREENWICH.

THE German chemist now hastened to take his departure. He had achieved his object, and wanted to be off.

He had managed things adroitly.

The rector watched him enter the hackney-coach, and then he withdrew.

In a few words the chemist made our friends aware of the success which had attended his efforts.

He directed the coachman to drive round to a certain portion of the wall that then surrounded the graveyard.

It was a dark place that they chose.

The coffin was easily raised by their joint efforts, and placed on the other side of the wall.

The chemist and our two friends scrambled after it.

The hackney-coach lumbered off, and was speedily lost in the darkness.

"All has gone most admirably," said the chemist. "I could never have anticipated such success. All we have now got to do is to bury the coffin with as much speed as possible and be off. After this all the world will believe that Jack Sheppard has ceased to exist."

"Instead of which, he has taken a fresh lease of existence," said Blueskin, in a cheerful tone.

"But how are we to dig a grave? We are not provided with any instruments."

"Never mind! I know where the sexton keeps his tools! Wait a moment, and I will soon get what you require."

With these words the chemist hurried off, and then returned with a spade.

Choosing as retired a portion of the graveyard as they could find, they began their task.

Blueskin took the spade, and worked with right good will, so that in a little while he had made quite a deep excavation.

"I have chosen a portion of the graveyard which can be overlooked by anyone standing at the upper windows in the rector's house," said the chemist, with a chuckle. "He will then see that all is fair and square."

"So he will."

Blueskin still continued at his task.

"Make a deep grave," said the chemist. "It won't do to have the coffin too near the surface."

"Lend me the spade," said Jack Sheppard. "I may as well have a hand in digging my grave. It is not everyone who has the opportunity."

"You must have a light heart to speak jestingly upon such a subject," said the chemist; "but you had better leave your comrade to do the work. Take my advice, and husband your strength as much as you can."

"And so say I," added Blueskin. "I can dig the grave, if you will leave me alone for a little while."

Blueskin resumed his work.

In a very short time the grave was pronounced by the German chemist to be quite deep enough.

Blueskin gladly desisted, and, resting himself on his spade, wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Now, then, to bury myself!" said Jack.

As he spoke, he took hold of the handle at one end of the coffin, while the chemist did the like with the one at the other end.

They then raised it easily, and lowered it into the grave.

It reached the bottom of the grave with a strange rattling sound.

"Dust to dust—ashes to ashes—and all that sort of thing, you know!" said Jack, sprinkling some earth upon the coffin.

"You seem to enjoy the joke," said the chemist.

"I do most heartily enjoy it! I think how deceived Jonathan Wild will be; and when he sees me again it will give him a bit of a turn, I rather think!"

"It will, depend upon it."

"He will think it is my spirit come to haunt him; and if he does, the thought will drive him nearly mad, for he is terribly frightened of ghosts and spirits, and such-like."

"Even that would be a revenge."

"It would."

While speaking, Blueskin began to shovel the earth very quickly into the grave.

His task did not occupy much time, and in a little while the hole was completely filled up.

"And now," said the chemist, "may I ask what is the next step you intend to take?"

"To leave England."

"A wise resolution."

"We have made up our minds to get on board some vessel to-night, if we could."

"The sooner the better; and I would not advise you to come back until the matter has quite blown over."

"We will not, for we have much to do."

"Then with this I think our little transaction terminates."

"It does," said Jack Sheppard; "and I shall ever feel grateful to you for saving me from death!"

"And I, too," said Blueskin. "You have performed your contract—indeed, you have exceeded it! The sum you ask shall be yours, and something more besides. You will find I am liberal."

The eyes of the German chemist sparkled with pleasure.

He was fond of gold, and was not particular what he did to obtain it.

But he did not love money with a miser's love.

On the contrary, that gold which he only obtained by the greatest hazard and risk, he squandered freely in the purchase of different apparatus and chemicals for the prosecution of his experiments.

And so he was glad to hear that Blueskin intended to behave to him with liberality.

"I have no gold, or very little," said Blueskin, "but I have money's worth. All you will have to do will be to take care how you effect the exchange. The articles I took from one of Jonathan Wild's secret hoards."

As he spoke, Blueskin produced the greater portion of the valuables he had with him, and gave them to the German chemist.

They were worth at the very least a thousand pounds.

The chemist was quite overcome by the liberality which was shown him.

"I will do my best at any time to serve you," he said, cringingly. "And now, where was it you intended to go?"

"To get on board a boat that would take us to Amsterdam."

"Enter that carriage, then, and instruct the driver where to take you."

"And you?"

"I am close home, and will go there on foot."

"Enough. I am much obliged to you, and I accept your offer with many thanks. I will reward the coachman for his trouble."

"This way, then. I will show you where he is."

Under the guidance of the German chemist, our two friends left the churchyard.

At the corner of one of the numerous courts with which at that time the church of St. Martin was surrounded was the carriage which had brought them there.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard entered the vehicle.

The German chemist closed the door and bade them farewell.

The driver was instructed to make his way to Greenwich.

He turned round, and the horses started off at a rapid pace.

"I think we may safely say," remarked Jack Sheppard, "that we have just bidden farewell to the most extraordinary individual it has ever been our fate to encounter."

"I am sure of it," replied Blueskin; "but we have much to be thankful to him for!"

Jack shuddered slightly as he said:

"Yes, for without him I should now be with the dead."

"You had a narrow escape, Jack! But it's a disagreeable subject, and for the future do not let us refer to it."

"With all my heart! I am quite ready to bury all recollection of it along with the empty coffin."

"Do so, then. We cannot do better than keep the whole affair as secret as we can."

"Yes; and, Blueskin—"

"What?"

"There is—Edgworth Bess—"

"What of her?"

"She—she need know nothing—"

"I would not for the world breathe to her a word of what has occurred! She may perhaps hear of it, but that you cannot help; but I shall never breathe a word about it in her presence."

"Thanks—thanks! I would fain keep from her any such dreadful knowledge."

"Let us drop the subject, Jack. I know for some time to come our thoughts will be recurring to what has happened, but we will not encourage them, and in a little while recollection will grow faint."

"Never with me—never with me!"

"Pho—pho! I tell you it will! What need is there to think of it? Rather consider that you have achieved a triumph over Jonathan Wild."

"A signal one."

"You have, and that hint about playing your own ghost might be advantageously improved upon."

"In what manner?"

"I should like him to suffer mental as well as bodily torment, and who knows what terror and agony he might suffer when he found that your ghost was haunting him?"

"That would be a glorious revenge, if the imposition could be maintained!"

"It would—it would! Jonathan would know what it was to suffer then."

"And now, Blueskin, what shall we do when we reach Greenwich?"

"Why, as soon as we can, we will get on board a vessel bound for Amsterdam."

"Shall we find one there?"

"I should think we should. I mentioned Greenwich because I thought we should not be likely to be so watched, or in such danger of being seen, as at London Bridge."

"Right—right!"

In such-like conversation as this the two friends filled up their time until the carriage reached Greenwich.

By the time they reached their destination, it was just beginning to grow light.

It was a miserably cold winter's morning, and there was little fear that there would be many people about to observe them.

The first thing they did upon their arrival was to dismiss the carriage, after having first given the driver a liberal sum for his trouble.

The two friends then set off in quest of a boat.

But at that early hour no one seemed to be astir.

They went down to the pier, and there, to their joy, they saw a waterman returning with his little vessel.

Our friends hailed him.

They then learned that there was a boat lying at anchor a little way down the river which was bound for the port of Amsterdam.

It would be under weigh at sunrise.

This was not far off, but still the waterman said that he could reach the vessel in time to put them on board.

They accordingly agreed that he should do so.

Fortune appeared to be favouring them, for they felt that they had not been seen in Greenwich by a single individual.

The air was very cold on the water, and our friends shivered.

They were chilled to the bone.

The tide was running out, and so the little skiff in which they sat made good progress down the river.

"There she is!" said the waterman, pointing to a vessel some distance ahead. "She will weigh anchor soon."

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard both directed their eyes towards the vessel in which they were to take passage.

It was a small but lumbering Dutch craft.

This was so much the better, for of course they would have preferred a foreign to an English vessel.

In about two more minutes they were alongside.

Upon hearing that they were passengers to Amsterdam, our friends were at once desired to come on board.

They paid the waterman his fare and did so.

The requisite preliminaries having been gone through, and having learned that the vessel would start in less than a quarter of an hour longer, our two friends went below.

Both were tired and weary, and they looked forward with great pleasure to the prospect of obtaining a few hours' rest.

The sleeping accommodation on board the Dutch vessel was not very comfortable and extensive, but such as it was Jack and Blueskin welcomed it eagerly.

They laid down to rest, and before they closed their

eyes a peculiar motion of the vessel let them know that their journey had commenced.

A sensation of security came over them, such as they had not for a long time felt.

For awhile they were out of danger, and with this conviction before their minds, they sank off into a deep slumber.

CHAPTER CCCCLII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD AT LENGTH REACH AMSTERDAM.

BLUESKIN and Jack Sheppard were both utterly exhausted, and in consequence they slept long and heavily.

When they awoke, they made their way up on deck and discovered it was evening.

They were completely out of sight of land.

Around them as far as they could see was nothing but the expanse of waters.

After the oppressive atmosphere below, the air on deck was very delightful.

It braced their nerves, and they looked about them with feelings of calmness and content.

But the progress of the boat was too slow for the impatience of Jack Sheppard.

He was burning to reach Amsterdam, and to be once more in the society of Edgworth Bess.

But many hours would have to elapse before the vessel could reach the shore, and how those hours were to be whiled away he knew not.

He had had sleep enough to last him for some time, and felt too full of energy and life to close his eyes in slumber.

There was but one subject that he could converse upon, and that grew wearisome by repetition.

They paced the deck together until the shades of evening deepened.

On one portion of the deck some of the sailors were assembled.

They were laughing, talking, smoking, and drinking, and altogether they looked as happy and comfortable as human beings possibly could.

In their pacing up and down, Blueskin and Jack passed them several times.

They were talking, and on one occasion our friends paused near them.

One of the sailors was engaged in the favourite occupation of spinning a yarn.

But when Jack and Blueskin paused near them, he stopped, and desired our friends to sit down.

They consented willingly, because by so doing they should pass away the time.

In listening to a yarn, they thought they should be better able to forget their own reflections.

"I was just beginning a yarn to my messmates," said one of the sailors, "and you are just in time to hear it. It's a good yarn, though I say so myself, but you will admit I am right when you have heard it."

"Go on, messmate."

"I am a-going on, if you will let me; but I mean to spin this here yarn in a proper fashion, and if anybody interrupts me, why you'll have to finish the yarn yourselves, for I won't."

"I'll give the first that interrupts you a taste of this marlinspike!"

This seemed sufficient for the sailor, after a few turns of his quid, placed it in his cheek for the present, and spoke as follows:

"Well, messmates all, you must know that once upon a time, when I was a young man, I shipped on board a craft that was bound for the Arctic Regions.

"I didn't care much about the voyage, but I could get nothing better, and I had been a long time without a berth, so I went.

"The first part of the voyage was right enough. The clothes were warm, the rations good, and the grog plenty. There wasn't much work, either, for there was more hands on board than were necessary to work the ship.

"I ought to tell you that we were bound on a regular wild-geese chase, and that was, to discover the North Pole. Some wise-headed land-lubbers said that the North Pole was land, and others said it was water. Of course one of them was bound to be right, and just as likely one

as the other; but such an important thing as that must be found out, and so off we went.

"For my part, I could not see what it mattered whether it was one or t'other, but, as I told you at first, all went well, and I found no call to grumble.

"At last we fairly reached the Arctic Regions.

"We stopped at the island of Disco for water and provisions.

"Scarcely, however, had we left this island than our troubles and misfortunes began.

"In the first place, a fog settled upon us. Ah, messmates, you should have seen that fog! I never had any idea of such a thing before.

"However, the fog settled upon us, and grew so dense that you could not see anything without it was within an inch of your nose. If you looked down, you could not see your own body, so you may guess it was no easy job to steer—in fact, the captain knew it, was impossible, so he gave orders for us to cast anchor.

"But this was impossible. The bottom of the ocean was nothing but soft blue clay. The anchor sank into it up to the stock, but it would hold no more than it would hold in water, and we drifted along just the same as ever.

"That was no go, and so away we went before a slight breeze, which seemed to blow the fog upon us instead of dispersing it.

"It was an awful time that. There we could feel the ship in motion, and could not form the least notion of what was ahead.

"We knew we were in Baffin's Bay, but there was not much comfort in knowing that, for I daresay you know Baffin's Bay is as full of icebergs as the Thames is of vessels, and just at the time I speak of they always drift south.

"This was the great trouble, for we could not tell how soon we might come in contact with one of them.

"I s'pose you've never seen an iceberg, messmates? Well, if you haven't, I can't describe one to you. An iceberg is a great mountain of ice and snow, running up into all manner of queer shapes, and as big round some of them as the Isle of Man and the Isle of Wight both rolled into one, and so high in some places that the tops were always in the clouds.

"You may guess, messmates, that these here wouldn't be very nice craft to come yawning down upon you. If you happened to go up against one it would smash the ship just like an egg against a brick wall.

"Well, on went the ship before the wind, and we couldn't hinder her, and the further we went the denser was the fog, and we were every moment expecting to bump up against one of the icebergs I've mentioned, and we all wondered how it was we had escaped so long, for before the fog came on we had seen plenty in the distance.

"Things was in this state when I heard the captain hailing. I found he had just hit upon the notion that the fog was not so dense at the masthead as it was upon deck, for if you looked round you or down, you couldn't see, but if you looked up, you could see the stars twinkling overhead.

"When he made this discovery it gave the captain a new idea, so he ordered me up to the masthead to keep a look-out, 'for,' said he, 'I fancy you will be able to see an iceberg from there.'

"Of course there was no disputing the captain's orders, though at the time I wished he had chosen some one else for the duty, for it was no very agreeable thing to climb up to the masthead when you could not see a bit what you were about.

"Afterwards, however, I had good cause to feel grateful, as you shall hear.

"I hitched up my breeches and turned my quid; then I said 'Ay, ay, sir!' to the captain, and up I went.

"I was an old salt then, and so the fog didn't make very much difference to me in making my way up the rigging.

"I found, however, that the higher I got the less dense the fog became, so it seemed after all as though I should be able to see an iceberg in time to call out to those below to steer clear of it.

"I became conscious, though, that the cold rapidly increased, and the fog seemed to settle down upon you, and turn into hoar frost, so that in a little time I was powdered over with white from head to foot.

"This was very peculiar, and if I had been in those

latitudes before I should have known what it meant, but as I hadn't I didn't.

"Up I went, then, and at last reached the masthead.

"Oh, lor! the recollection of that moment quite gives me a turn even now! I wonder how it was I didn't let go my hold, and drop down to the deck again.

"The air was comparatively clear, and the fog little more than a mist, through which near objects could be seen without the slightest difficulty.

"To my horror, then, I saw on the larboard bow a huge iceberg.

"I knew what it was in a moment, and a kind of cry escaped my lips.

"It was bearing down upon us with great rapidity."

"A collision was inevitable—the vessel could not possibly escape.

"About the result of that collision there could be no doubt—the vessel would be dashed to pieces.

"I knew this—it flashed into my mind in a moment.

"From the partial glimpse which I obtained, I fancied the iceberg was of enormous size. That part nearest to me was a long level plain covered with snow, while the higher portions rose up suddenly around it.

"We had drifted on, unconscious of our danger, until it was too late for us to save ourselves.

"I gave myself and everybody else in the vessel up for lost.

"Escape seemed impossible, and I knew that a collision was certain.

"Down into the sea I should go, along with the fragments of ice and the splinters of the ship, and the intense coldness of the water would put an end to life.

"All at once, however, and just as the ship was about to strike, a hope darted into my mind that I might escape.

"Uttering loud cries of alarm, I scrambled along the crossrees until I reached the extremity.

"The iceberg was now alarmingly close.

"The level portion of which I have spoken was a little lower than the crossrees. It was covered with snow, and I thought if I leaped forward with all my might, I should be able to alight upon this level plain.

"The snow that was upon it would break the force of the fall, and I should receive little injury.

"There was no time for reflection. I might say, just as soon as the thought entered my head I jumped.

"At the very moment I left the crossrees the ship struck.

"The sound was one that I shall never forget.

"What happened afterwards I know not. I came down upon the iceberg with great force, and I lay quite still just where I had fallen without the least sense or motion.

"I suppose I shall never know how long I had laid in that state of insensibility! It must have been a long time—several hours at least.

"When I awoke, the first thing I experienced was a sensation of awful cold. I could not stir.

"By an effort, however, I scrambled to my feet.

"I looked about me.

"The heavy fog which had been the cause of so much disaster had quite faded away—there was not so much as a mist even on the surface of the ocean.

"It was morning, and the sun was shining brightly out of a sky in which there was not a cloud to be seen.

"But as yet he was low down on the horizon, and his beams, though bright, did not possess much warmth.

"I thought, of course, about the ship.

"My memory at first was rather confused, and I had some difficulty in recollecting what had occurred.

"Suddenly, however, everything came back to me.

"I rushed to the edge of the iceberg—to that side against which the ship had struck.

"I paused on the very verge.

"I looked down.

"Below me was a precipice as smooth as glass itself.

"Its base was just washed by the waves, which came plashing up against it with a pleasant sound.

"But the ship?"

"Far and wide I looked about me, but not the faintest traces of the gallant vessel could I see.

"She had disappeared as completely as though she had never been.

"For some time I stood motionless, for I was almost stupefied with horror.

"My companions were all gone—all dead.



[THE POLICE OFFICERS ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE JONATHAN WILD.]

"I was the only one left out of so many souls—I was the only one.

"For what purpose was I saved?

"Was it in order that I might relate the dreadful story of the vessel's loss, or had I been saved from sudden death to perish by slow degrees?

"I shuddered when I thought of this, and retreated a few paces.

"I began now to think upon my dreadful and singular position, and to wonder what would be my ultimate fate.

"I looked around me, but I was unable to perceive the least signs of land, or of a vessel—nothing met my gaze but the sea, the surface of which was broken up by numberless fragments of floating ice.

"I was alone on an iceberg.

No. 95.—BLUESKIN.

CHAPTER CCCCLIII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN ARRIVE TOO LATE AT AMSTERDAM.

"ALONE and on an iceberg! What a singular position for anyone to be placed in! Alone in the centre of an Arctic sea.

"The more I thought upon my position, the more hopeless and despondent did I feel.

"How was I to escape? How was I to preserve my life?

"I was out of the track which vessels generally took—I was on a sea which, from the danger of its navigation, was rarely visited.

"It seemed that I had been saved to perish by that most frightful death, starvation.

"I was completely overcome as I made these reflections.

tions; and so I sat down on the snow and fairly wept. At that moment I felt like a child, and I acted like one.

"I am not one, however, to be easily cast down, and whatever self-reliance I had I now summoned to my assistance.

"I rose up, and resolved to make an examination of the place upon which I had been so strangely cast.

"The level portion of which I have spoken was of considerable extent; but I soon made an examination of it, which convinced me that it possessed no peculiar features.

"This level plain was bounded on three sides by high, jagged pieces of ice, which rose upward in many strange and fanciful shapes.

"The three smooth, slippery sides did not offer the least facilities for an ascent. I made, however, several attempts to reach the higher portions, but I failed every time, and at last I was obliged to give up the attempt in despair.

"The fourth side was open to the sea, so that it was only a portion of the vast expanse of waters of which I could obtain a view.

"I might drift past land or a hundred vessels on the other side, and be none the wiser.

"This made me determine to make some more attempts to reach the higher parts, from which I felt certain a good view could be had.

"I was very, very cold. Fortunately for me, however, the clothing I had on was especially adapted for the climate, but for this I must have perished of cold alone.

"The exercise which I had taken sent a kind of warmth through my frame, and the sun every moment increased in power.

"There was nothing left for me to do but to turn the whole of my attention to climbing upward, but I could not see how the feat was to be performed.

"I went round and round several times trying to find the place that seemed easiest to climb, but all were difficult.

"I was obliged at last to choose the lowest place.

"But this was high up above my head, and was quite out of my reach.

"Still I had hope, for I had sailed in the South Seas, and had seen the Indians there climb up tall trees with trunks as smooth as the ice before me.

"The method they adopted was to cut holes in the trunk with a kind of hatchet or tomahawk.

"Into these holes they placed their hands and feet, and so on until they reached the top.

"I had no axe, it is true, but I had a strong knife, so I took this out of my pocket, and, after a great deal of labour, managed to cut two holes in the ice at a proper height, and at a convenient distance from each other.

"Into the lower hole I put my foot, and into the upper one my hand.

"In this manner I hung, and chipped another hole, into which I placed my foot, and so on until the higher portion of the iceberg was within reach of my hand.

"I took hold of it firmly, and drew myself up without much trouble, and then lay down panting and exhausted.

"But I soon got on my feet again, for I was impatient and anxious to see what was going on around me.

"I looked about.

"I found I could command a much more extensive view than formerly.

"I could see over about three-fourths of the horizon.

"I strained my eyes to the utmost, and looked, in slow succession, over every portion of the expanse spread out before me.

"But I could see nothing more than I could from the platform below.

"There was not a vessel in sight, nor were there any signs of land.

"It was, indeed, foolish of me to think of finding a ship, for I knew well I was in a latitude which vessels rarely reached.

"Turning about, I found that the higher portions of the iceberg still hid a great deal of the horizon from my view.

"But I fancied, from the appearance of the rude blocks of ice around me, that I should be able to scramble over them, and work my way round.

"As soon as I thought about this, I set to work to try whether I could do it.

"The way was very rough, and I had several falls, but none of them were very severe ones.

"I got up on my feet again, and continued on my way.

"At last I got round to that part of the iceberg which was opposite to the side upon which I had alighted when I took my frantic leap from the vessel.

"My hope, however, that from this point I should be able to obtain a glimpse of land was defeated.

"There was nothing but water to be seen.

"Well, messmates, when I made this discovery I can tell you I was almost ready to jump into the sea with despair.

"There I was, in a prison—a strange one, it is true, but yet a prison, and one from which there was no chance of release.

"Still, I had some hope—the iceberg was in motion. A glance up at the sun let me know that it was drifting in a southerly direction.

"If this motion was maintained I should eventually reach the land, or else enter those seas in which vessels are frequently found.

"But in the meantime I might perish either by cold or hunger, for I had neither fire nor food.

"I shivered and shuddered at the thought, and my hopes sunk again.

"A little while afterwards I looked round about me, for the appearance of the iceberg was so singular and so very different to anything I had ever seen before, that I felt as though I could never grow tired of gazing at it.

"Suddenly I perceived a small dark object on a distant projection of the berg.

"Its darkness showed out in remarkable contrast to the masses of snow surrounding it, and made the object much more conspicuous than it otherwise would have been.

"My curiosity was immediately attracted to this dark object, and I resolved to get closer, and so obtain a better view.

"It was a wise resolution to take, for by keeping my body in motion I was better able to withstand the cold.

"I could feel that I was already numbed, and discovered, too, that this part of the iceberg was much colder than the rest, because it had a north-easterly aspect.

"I scrambled along towards the projection on which the dark object rested. Of the object itself, however, I soon lost sight, for it was above me, and the masses of ice hid it from my view.

"I was rather surprised to find a kind of rude path, which seemed to lead up to the projection, and by continuing along it I was able to ascend with much greater ease than I could possibly have anticipated.

"At length I reached the top, and emerged upon a small platform.

"The moment I did so I uttered a cry, and it was a thousand wonders I did not fall headlong backwards down the steep path I had climbed.

"But I recovered my balance, and then, with wide-open mouth and eyes, stood gazing at the dark object.

"I was no longer in doubt as to what it was. It was fully revealed to me—

"The body of a man!

"That was what the dark object was—the body of a man!

"You can guess, messmates, how I should feel after making such a discovery as that. I had thought of it being all manner of things, but I never thought of it being that.

"After a time, I became more like myself, so I approached still nearer.

"Something seemed to tell me from the first that this man was dead, and now I found it was so.

"He was dead, and must have been so very long, though the intense cold had, in a very remarkable manner, preserved him, so that he looked as though he had been dead for a short time only.

"But I had been told how cold would preserve dead bodies, and this was a good instance of it.

"Going closer still, I saw that the man was a countryman of my own, and that he was of the same profession as myself—namely, a sailor.

"This interested me more than ever.

"I was shocked to perceive that the body did not possess a single ounce of flesh.

"There was skin and bone and some of the harder muscles left, but that was all.

"Such a horrible sight as that I had never seen before, and I hoped I never should.

"There could be only one way of accounting for his presence on the iceberg. He had been cast upon it in the same manner as I had been, and being unable to find food or fuel, he had perished—perished miserably, out of the sight of all his fellow-creatures.

"As I made these reflections, my heart swelled till I thought it would burst, and I threw myself down on the snow and wept and groaned.

"This will be my fate," I said to myself—"this will be my fate! My companions are happy, for they are past trouble, while I am here, unable to resist the slow approach of a horrible and dreadful death!"

"At last I was exhausted by the violence of my own emotions, and I rose to my feet.

"There, in a strange sitting posture, was the dead body of the sailor.

"His arms were hanging down idly by his side, and his face, which wore a sorrowful expression, was turned seaward.

I looked at once in the direction of that unconscious gaze, but there was nothing to be seen but the gently-heaving sea.

"But as I gazed, I became conscious of something which I did not know before.

"The place upon which I stood commanded a more extensive view than any other upon which I had yet set my foot.

"There was but a small portion of the horizon hidden from me, and that was in the north, the direction from which the iceberg was slowly but surely drifting, and in which I did not care to look.

"I have said that the iceberg was moving. It glided through the water with a motion as gentle and regular as the best ship on the ocean, and if it continued on its way I must reach land.

"But its progress was very, very slow—at least, it seemed to me to be. I was many hundreds of miles from any portion of the habitable globe, and though I might at last reach some friendly shore, yet it became a very nice question as to whether I should be able to support my life until that time arrived.

"In honest truth there seemed little hope of such a thing. In the first place, the cold was awful, and in the second, I was already faint for want of food.

"How then was I to sustain existence for several days—perhaps weeks?

"I must inevitably perish with hunger, as it was evident my predecessor had done.

"It was an awful thing, but there was my fate before me. I could see to what I should come at last.

"Perhaps," said I, unconsciously, 'some other human being may be cast upon this mountain of ice, and then he will behold two victims.'

"As the sun sank I felt the cold rapidly increasing, and I dreaded that before dawn I should be frozen to death.

"I had no incentive to move about, for I was really too tired and exhausted to stir a step, and the pangs of hunger were almost more than I could endure.

"I sat down on the snow beside my dead comrade, and looked out upon the ocean as he had done up to the last moment of his life.

"Presently I saw coming towards me a huge flock of birds. They were high in the air, and were making their way southward.

"They were large white birds, and the flapping of their wings was the first thing which attracted my attention, for I was sitting with my back turned in the direction from which they had come.

"They seemed to hover over the iceberg, I thought—it was quite certain their onward progress was not continued.

"I sat half-dreaming, wondering why this should be, when I was surprised to find the birds gradually settling down, until at last many parts of the iceberg were literally covered with them."

birds away from the place where I sat, as though they knew I was an enemy.

"It was the approach of night, which no doubt made the birds settle upon the iceberg, for there was no other resting-place anywhere visible.

"They were tired, no doubt, with a long flight over the ocean, and wished to rest until the morrow, when they would resume their journey.

"Oh, how eagerly I wished for one of them, so hungry as I was! but I was forced to confess that I had no means of catching one of them.

"By slow degrees night came on.

"I occupied my thoughts incessantly in the endeavour to devise some means of capturing some of these birds, but I could think of nothing better than waiting until the middle of the night, until they were sound asleep, when I should be able to steal upon them and capture them.

"And so I waited patiently until night came.

"Slowly and cautiously I then descended from my post of observation.

"The birds were scattered everywhere over the iceberg, generally in flocks from fifty to a hundred in number.

"These were pressed as closely against each other as it was possible for them to be, no doubt for the warmth which would be thus produced.

"With the greatest caution, I stole to one of the largest flocks I could see.

"The birds made no movement, and did not in any way appear to notice my approach.

"This did not surprise me, because I was aware that birds slept heavily.

"At length they were within my reach.

"Before making my attack, I had had time to consider what I should do, and though I was sorely tempted by hunger, I firmly adhered to my intention, which was this:

"I determined to catch and kill as many as I could while I had the opportunity.

"I put out my hand and took hold of one.

"It struggled desperately, and flapped its wings and uttered shrill screams.

"But they were quickly cut short, for I wrung its neck.

"Another and another followed, until at length I had quite a heap lying at my feet, and then I was unable to withstand the cravings of my stomach any longer.

"Like a wild beast, I seized upon the still palpitating animal, and commenced to devour it.

"I ate voraciously; and then, completely worn out, I crept into a little nook and fell asleep.

"I did not awake until the sun shone into my eyes, and then I looked about me confusedly, for I could not at first recollect where I was.

"Remembrance of the past very soon returned to me, however, and then I attempted to rise.

"I found this for a long time impossible, for my limbs were rigid with cold.

"In the end, I did succeed in gaining my feet; and then I ran about as well as I could to restore the circulation of my blood.

"In a little time I could move my limbs freely; and a kind of glow overspread my whole frame.

"I should have thought my adventure with the birds a dream, for now there was not one to be seen, but the pile of dead which lay on the snow a little way off convinced me of the reality of the past.

"The sight of the food seemed to cause an appetite, and I hastened towards the birds and devoured a great portion of another, raw as it was, for I banished the thought of cooking, knowing full well that it was impossible to obtain a fire.

"When I had made this repast, I placed all the dead birds in the nook in which I had slept.

"I looked upon them as a treasure.

"Then, with a sinking heart, I once more climbed to that upper platform upon which the dead body of the sailor sat in so singular an attitude.

"I hoped—and yet I did not dare to hope—that I should see in the distance some indication of land, or of a passing vessel.

"Anxiously I looked; and though I had, as I imagined, schooled myself to bear disappointment, a groan came from my lips when I found that there was nothing to be seen but the wide ocean.

"We were still in the Arctic Regions, though I felt convinced the iceberg was many miles south of the spot

CHAPTER CCCCLIV.

THE SAILOR'S EXTRAORDINARY NARRATIVE IS CONTINUED

"SOME kind of instinct seemed to guide these strang-

where the collision had taken place between it and our vessel.

"If the motion continued, surely I thought all would be well, for had I not sufficient food to last me for a considerable period.

"I ought not to despair, dreadful and solitary as was my position.

"I turned round, and my eyes again fell upon the dead and frozen body of the sailor.

"Ah!" I said to myself, 'I have much to be thankful for! He perished for want of food; but I possess the means to live. Such a fate as his—though I at first feared it—will not be mine.'

"But my felicitations did not long continue, for my thoughts took a new turn.

"Perhaps this man supported existence upon this iceberg for a length of time—perhaps he, too, found food as I have done, and yet he perished.

"This reflection, which seemed so probable, completely cast me down.

"I felt a strong desire to learn some particulars concerning this dead sailor, but how was I to obtain any information? If I spoke, those frozen lips were incapable of returning me any reply.

"How, then, was I to learn that which I so much longed to know?

"I fancied, after awhile, that he must have left some record behind him, but I could see nothing. Overcoming my first feelings of repugnance, I searched in his pockets, but I could not find writing materials of any kind.

"That hope, then, was destroyed.

"Raising my head, I perceived upon the smooth piece of ice against which his back reclined the indications of some rudely-traced characters.

"I looked more closely, and found that I was right. Some words had evidently been roughly engraved upon the ice.

"Here, then, was promise of an occupation—here was something to do—something to pass away the long and tedious hours which otherwise would have driven me frantic.

"I would set myself to work to decipher these rude characters. I am not much of a scholar, and the task would be all the more difficult on that very account.

"Still I had hope of success, for the letters, though badly formed, were large.

"I removed the snow which had settled in some of them, and after a long while, managed to make out these words. I recollect them perfectly—indeed I shall never forget them, not to the day of my death—they are deep in my memory, and I learned them little by little.

"The words were these. You will find they are not complete, for in places the letters had become effaced, and I could only guess at what they were:—

"Swam from the good ship Nautilus, after she foundered with all hands on board, on to this iceberg. I have been here a long, long while. I have, lost count of time, and cannot tell how long. It seems to me years. For a time I subsisted on birds, which from time to time settled on the iceberg, and which I killed when they were asleep at night, but after a time they ceased to come, and, (Then there was something which I could not make out, and then) 'Starved to death by slow degrees!' (another break) 'No food—no food of any kind—I have eaten nothing for four or five days! I am weak—I cannot—'

"That was all—the rest I could not make out.

"I should tell you that the first words of this inscription were deeply cut into the ice, as though with a firm hand, but the others only seemed to be scratched upon the glassy surface, as though the poor wretch did not possess strength enough to use the knife for this purpose.

"Messmates, can you form any idea of the effect which this had upon me? I was ten thousand times more miserable and downcast than before.

"My forebodings were all realised. He had protracted a miserable existence, as I appeared to have a chance of doing, and there was the result. He had avoided death for a long while, but it had come at last.

"I wept again, and could not help giving vent to my feelings in that childish manner.

"Oh! the solitude of that iceberg was something awful,

and the silence seemed to weigh me down. As far as ever I could see, and that was for many miles, I could not perceive a single living thing, and there was no sound save the heaving of the sea against the base of the mass of ice, and that was so far below me that I could scarcely hear it.

"It was as though I was alone in the world.

"I sat down and buried my face in my hands.

"How long I continued in this position I know not, but at length, half frozen by the cold, I got up, and a scream came from my lips.

"I happened to look across the sea, and there I saw a vessel under full sail.

"But it was at an enormous distance—so far off, indeed, that scarce anyone but a seaman could have told what it was.

"I knew, and shrieked again and again. I called for help frantically, and waved my arms in the air, until exhaustion compelled me to desist.

"It was not until then that I remembered how foolishly I had acted, for at such a distance scarcely any sound would have been audible.

"Nor would my form be seen. The iceberg would, for its size was immense, but in comparison with the huge mass my body would have appeared as the tiniest speck.

"How, then, was I to attract attention to my melancholy and forlorn situation?

"I could not tell.

"If I did not do something that could be seen by those on board they would not come near the iceberg, for no vessel ventures closer than they are compelled, for they are dangerous neighbours.

"In hoping to see a ship, I had not thought of this before. I should be shunned by every craft.

"Quite worn out, I watched with straining eyes the course of the distant vessel. It seemed to be making its way towards me, and I soon found that if it continued in its present course it would pass by.

"Nearer and nearer it came, but at last night came on, and then it was hidden from my sight.

"I was frantic.

"When I last saw the vessel, she was comparatively close, and I feared in the morning by the time day dawned she would have passed me.

"Throughout the whole of that night I never once closed my eyes, but sat with them fixed upon the spot where I had last seen the ship.

"The darkness was most intense, and I could only see for a few yards before me.

"At last the morning, which I had so ardently wished for, came.

"I started quickly to my feet.

"Gradually and gradually distant objects became revealed to my ardent gaze.

"I looked around in every direction.

"But not the least trace of the vessel could I see—she had vanished as utterly and completely as though she had never been.

"In vain I turned my gaze in every direction. I could see nothing of her, and where she had gone to seemed a mystery. I could not make it out.

"I expected to see something of it, even if the iceberg had been passed.

"But no—nothing of the kind. I was once more alone on an iceberg—alone on the ocean.

"I felt as though I could gladly leap off some projection into the sea, and so terminate my life at once, but hope again found an abiding-place in my heart.

"The motion of the iceberg was increased in swiftness, and the position of the sun told me that it was still drifting in a southerly direction.

"I again descended to the place where I had stowed the birds, and made another hearty meal, after which, feeling better both in body and mind, I determined to climb up some portion of the iceberg from which a view to the north could be obtained, in order to find whether I could not see something of the ship receding in the distance."

CHAPTER CCCCLV.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD MAKE A SAD DISCOVERY ON THE BORDERS OF THE LITTLE WOOD.

"ANYTHING involving occupation was pleasing to me, so I at once set about carrying out this last resolve

"I climbed up, and soon reached a place which exactly suited me.

"Placing my back against a mass of ice that was behind me, I looked northward.

"What I beheld much surprised me, so different was it from what I had expected.

"In the first place, I ought to tell you that I could see nothing of the ship.

"I soon satisfied myself that she was nowhere in sight.

"But I was astonished to find that the sea to the northward was dotted all over with icebergs.

"The one upon which I stood was in advance of all the rest.

"The remainder came following in irregular order, and stretched to the north as far as ever I could see.

"They were of all sizes and all shapes.

"But of all the rest, one particularly attracted my attention.

"It was of enormous size—so gigantic, indeed, that it made all the others, even the one I was upon, seem insignificant and small.

"It was the hugest mass of ice I had ever seen or heard of.

"It was very close to the one upon which I stood, and immediately behind it.

"Its shape was irregular, as all icebergs are. It was like a number of mountains all crowded together without attention to order.

"The many strange shapes and colours which it assumed attracted a great deal of my attention, and I looked at it for some time.

"After awhile—I cannot tell just when—I became cognizant of a very alarming circumstance.

"At first I had refused to credit my own senses, but I was soon forced into belief of what I saw.

"The huge iceberg was rapidly coming nearer.

"I almost held my breath, for as I looked I could see the intervening distance rapidly diminish.

"How this could be, or why, I could not for the life of me make out, but it was nevertheless a fact.

"The huge iceberg was drifting with a swifter motion than the one which I may almost call mine.

"Whether this was attributable to its great width, which caught the breeze which came from the north, or whether it was attributable to something else I was unable to decide.

"But to my excited fancy its speed seemed to increase and increase.

"I knew it was no uncommon thing for two icebergs to dash violently against each other and crumble to fragments.

"A collision now seemed inevitable and imminent.

"The iceberg upon which I was seemed to move more and more slowly, until at last it ceased to move at all.

"The other came on swifter than ever.

"I shrank back against the ice, and found myself making a furious effort to accelerate the motion of the huge mass.

"But all my efforts were mocked at.

"This was a danger I had not thought of—that I should be menaced by such a peril had never occurred to me.

"All other dangers sank into insignificance before this one.

"What was I to do to secure my safety?

"I knew not, and continued to gaze with a kind of fascination upon the approaching mass.

"It was coming with more swiftness—I felt assured it was not my fancy that made me think so.

"I was unable to move from where I stood—indeed, I never once thought of it, and I should have been no safer, perhaps, even if I had changed my position.

"Death was before me—death was staring me in the face, and I had no means of saving myself.

"At last, with a sound which I shall never forget, the icebergs came into collision.

"What happened afterwards I cannot tell. I felt that I was hurled to a distance, and a horrible, crashing splitting sound was in my ears.

"When I recovered myself I found I was clinging to a small piece of ice—that was, small in comparison to the two huge masses of which I have spoken.

"I was on a fragment of one of the icebergs—I do not know which—that was about an acre in extent

"Of the two icebergs only a multitude of fragments, such as the one I was upon, remained.

"These were dotted all over the ocean to an immense distance, and were continually striking against each other and disappearing.

"I was soaking wet, which proved I had been immersed; and how far I was from the place where the collision took place would have been very hard to say.

"The sea was in a state of terrible commotion, owing to the disturbance the falling masses had caused, and the piece I was on rolled and pitched in a manner that made me think I was about to be hurled into the sea.

"But by degrees the sea calmed down, and again I drifted in a southerly direction.

"I was, however, much worse off than before, for I had no provisions, and there was great danger that so small a piece of ice would overturn or dissolve into minute fragments.

"But I was doomed to be menaced by a danger of a very different description to any which I had anticipated.

"I was startled by hearing a low, growling sound, which, as I heard it, seemed to turn me to stone.

"I should have told you the small piece of ice upon which I was happened to be of peculiar shape.

"It rose up in the centre into a projection, so that I could not see to the other side, although the piece of ice was so small.

"It was from behind me that the growling sound came, and I quickly turned my gaze in that direction, and then I saw coming towards me a huge polar bear.

"I felt then that I had reached the end of my escapes.

"Many tales had I heard told about these animals, and I looked upon the one which was approaching with the utmost horror.

"Its appearance was well calculated to excite such a feeling, for the creature seemed to be on the verge of starvation.

"Its bones were almost through the skin, and its eyes were red and bloodshot, and glared upon me in a manner I can convey no idea of by mere description.

"It was quite certain that the animal rendered bold by the pangs of hunger, intended to attack me; and how was I to defend myself?

"The creature came on slowly and stealthfully, and how was I to avoid it? Once caught in its embrace my fate would be sealed.

"It may seem strange to you, messmates, that a bear should be upon an iceberg, but those who travel in those regions will tell you that such a thing is common enough. In the winter, when the sea is frozen all over, the bears continually prow over it, and when in the spring the pieces become detached, they drift off with them, and are carried out to sea.

"Such was the case in the present instance. The bear had been upon the large iceberg, and no doubt had been a long time without food.

"How it happened that we should be both upon the same piece of ice I cannot tell you, but so it was, and I found the circumstance a disagreeable one.

"I had my knife, and that was the only weapon I possessed; but how could I hope to cope with a bear with such an instrument?

"I could use it only in close quarters, and in close quarters I should perish by the hug which the bear would give me.

"I endeavoured to frighten the dreadful animal and scare it away, but my efforts only seemed to have the effect of enraging him, and so I discontinued them.

"I grasped my knife in my hand, and determined to sell my life dearly. I could not retreat without I chose to take refuge in the sea, and that was only preferring one death to another.

"I grew desperate.

"The bear continued to make its stealthful advance.

"I endeavoured to show a bold front, for I had heard that the most ferocious wild beasts will not attack a man who faces them and deliberately awaits their approach.

"However true that might be in a general way, I found that it would not do for a hungry polar bear. The hungry, clumsy creature continued its advance towards me, and licked its lips in anticipation of the meal it was about to take.

"I had never seen a bear before, and didn't know any-

thing about their powers of mischief beyond mere hearsay.

"I had received terrific accounts, and felt already that my race was run.

"To my surprise the bear now rose upon its two hind feet, and came towards me in that manner.

"It's fore paws were extended as though eager to seize and hold me in that close and fatal embrace.

"I shuddered, but, rendered desperate by my situation, and feeling that I could not make my peril greater than it was, I resolved to begin the attack.

"The attack was inevitable, and by being the one to commence I might in that way gain an advantage, which I otherwise could not.

"Accordingly, instead of waiting for the bear, I walked forwards as firmly and deliberately as the nature of the ice and snow beneath my feet would permit.

"The bear, perceiving this alteration in my demeanour, paused, as it seemed to me, irresolutely.

"I determined to take advantage of that moment.

"Knife in hand, I rushed forward.

"I reached my adversary in a second, and inflicted, with the rapidity of lightning, three fierce stabs in as near the region of the heart as possible.

"The blood spurted out at each blow, and so quick and sudden was I that the wounds were inflicted before the beast had time to recover from the astonishment which this sudden attack had doubtless caused it.

"I drew out the knife, and, rendered bold by my success, prepared to inflict a fourth wound, but suddenly I felt the bears huge paws close around me and hug me tightly.

"Still, I held the knife with the point turned towards the creature's heart, and so the more he squeezed the deeper the knife penetrated.

"But this seemed to be unheeded, and the pressure was increased until my bones cracked again, and every bit of breath seemed driven out of my body.

"I felt that I could not sustain such a violent pressure, and then I became unconscious.

"When I recovered myself, I found I was lying by the side of the bear.

"The voracious animal was quite dead.

"The wounds which I had been lucky enough to inflict were fatal ones; and, after I fainted, the pressure of the paws must have relaxed, and the animal had fallen back dead.

"I felt terribly bruised and hurt, and every breath I drew gave me acute pain, which made me think I had received some severe internal injury.

"I crept towards my antagonist, in order to ascertain whether life was indeed extinct.

"The body was quite warm, and the blood was still flowing, which showed at once that my insensibility had not lasted for a very long time.

"The bear was nevertheless quite dead. All animation had departed; and so this encounter, which was at first fraught with so much danger, in the end turned out to my advantage.

"But I had had a very narrow escape of my life; though, as you shall hear, my perils were not over yet.

"Finding the bear was quite dead, I now occupied myself in considering how I could reap the most benefit from the transaction.

"I resolved to strip off his skin, and to use it to wrap myself up in; I should then be in a position to withstand the inclemency of the weather.

"The flesh I would eat; and so I had provisions for a length of time.

"The presence of the bear on that particular piece of ice was, however, a great puzzle to me, and I determined to climb up and look over on to the other side.

"I did so, and found the icesloped gently down to the sea.

"Very likely the violence of the collision had hurled the bear into the water, and he had swam towards that piece of ice on to which he would be able to get with very little difficulty indeed."

"When I had done this, I ate some of the flesh, which was quite the reverse of palatable.

"By this time night had come, and so I wrapped myself up in the bearskin. It was warmer than I could possibly have expected, and in a little while I was sound asleep.

"I slept till a late hour the next morning, and probably should have slept much longer than I did, but I was suddenly awakened by a terrific crash.

"I started up instantly.

"The sea was violently agitated, and I discovered with alarm that at least half of the piece of ice had disappeared.

"It was the crash of the collision which had woke me.

"The piece that was left was now very small indeed, and of a sugar-loaf sort of shape. For its size, its height was very disproportionate.

"The upper portion, too, nodded about in a manner that excited in my breast the liveliest apprehension; and first one side of the base would sink beneath the waves, and then the other.

"Indeed, I soon found that the fragment of ice was in danger of overturning.

"Had I known then as much as I know now, I should have been certain of it.

"I have seen fragments of ice gradually broken away about the base, until the upper portion has overbalanced, and turned the fragment bottom upwards.

"This is what I momentarily expected, and my expectations were realised.

"With a sudden lurch, the piece of ice turned topsyturvy.

"I clung frantically to a jutting point, but the ice slipped from my hold, and I found myself plunged in the sea.

"I rose to the surface and struck out instantly, for I could swim well.

"I saw a piece of ice floating near me, and I swam towards it.

"After many trials, I succeeded in climbing on to it, and then I stood up, and shook the water from my garments as well as I could.

"My position was now very much worse than it had been hitherto.

"I had lost all that I had gained with so much pains—my stock of birds, my bear-skin, and the carcass of the animal itself.

"I no longer possessed any protection against the weather, nor a particle of food.

"My clothes, too, being so wet, put me to very great inconvenience, for they were cold, and clung closely to me.

"The piece of ice was a mere fragment, and did not seem at all capable of bearing my weight.

"That it would carry me far I did not think for one instant, for, as I approached the southern latitude, it melted gradually away.

"Had the block been large it would perhaps have withstood the warmth, or at any rate would not have melted away so as to disable me from floating upon it.

"I now, looked about me and saw a ship in the distance, but I felt too miserable and wretched to hail it, or make any signal. The ship was, however, at an immense distance.

"Ships now frequently came in sight, and those that were near I endeavoured to attract the attention of, but it was in vain—none saw me, or, at least, none paid any attention to me.

"I quickly became almost unable to move in the least degree.

"Contrary to my expectations, the piece of ice continued to sustain me in a very satisfactory manner, and that for a long period.

"So many ships had passed me that at last I seemed to pay no attention to them, and turned my eyes constantly in search of land.

"After many days' suffering I at last had the joy of perceiving land in the distance.

"Feverishly I watched it, and observed with joy that the block of ice drifted in the coveted direction.

"But the motion was slow—dreadfully so.

"The prospect of being saved infused new strength into my limbs, and I succeeded at last in paddling the

CHAPTER CCCLVI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPARD MEET WITH A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

"FEELING that this was doubtless the true solution of the affair, I crept down again, and, as I told you I intended to do, I stripped off the skin of the bear.

water with my hands, by which means I caused the block of ice to advance with greater rapidity.

"I need not spin this yarn any longer, messmates, for the best part of it is over, and it is time I was done. I did not think it would take so long when I began telling it. It will do now if I make a long story short by saying that I in the end reached the shore, though, as may be expected, I was in a dreadfully exhausted condition.

"Fortunately for me, I got ashore within a short distance of a Danish settlement, by the inhabitants of which I was received with great kindness and attention.

"By their care I quickly recovered, and when I was well enough to do so, I told them my strange story.

"After that I got a passage on a homeward-bound vessel, and then, though you will scarcely believe it, shipped on board another ship bound for the Polar Regions.

"What befel me on that occasion I can't tell you now; but mayhap, messmates, upon some other occasion I will spin you a yarn about that too."

With these words the sailor ceased, and he and his comrades, rising to their feet, resumed their ordinary duties.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard listened to his extraordinary narrative with feelings of great interest.

The events described were of a character such as had never befallen them—of a character, indeed, that they had never before heard of.

Gladly enough would they have pressed him to continue the recital of his adventures.

The yarn had served to while away the long silent hours of the night, and now a faint flush of light in the east betokened the coming of the new day.

The first rays of the rising sun showed our friends that they were within sight of land.

In a little while—a few hours at most—their journey would be over.

To their impatient spirits the progress of the vessel appeared to be inordinately slow, and the very shore seemed to recede as they approached it.

Jack's heart fluttered terribly with suspense.

After so long a separation, and after the occurrence of so many strange events, he was at last to meet Edgworth Bess.

A strange thrill of delight would shoot through his frame, and then would be quickly succeeded by a feeling of sadness and depression.

The poet has written—"Coming events cast their shadows before;" and it certainly seemed as though Jack had some presentiment of what was in store for him in the future.

Without knowing why, his heart swelled and his throat ached, as though overcome by pent-up grief which was struggling to find a vent.

Blueskin tried hard to persuade him that all this arose merely from his anxiety to rejoin the object of his affections.

Jack Sheppard, however, was filled with the dread of something having happened that would have the effect of overturning his happiness.

With his breast torn by these conflicting emotions—at one time filled with joy, and at another cast down by despair—the remainder of the voyage was performed.

Our two friends stood at the prow of the vessel, and kept their eyes fixed constantly upon the shore.

Gradually the long dark line which had first indicated land resolved itself into confused shapes, and those in their turn resolved themselves into the buildings near the beach.

The time from the moment when they first caught sight of land until the boat reached the pier seemed to our friends to be equal in length to the whole of the voyage.

At last, however, the boat was moored alongside the pier.

The first persons who leaped from the boat were our friends Jack and Blueskin.

At the landing-place a large crowd of persons was assembled, and, eluding observation as much as possible, they made their way towards the town.

In his impatience Jack would have proceeded at a running pace, but Blueskin checked him.

"You must be cautious! If you are not, suspicion may be excited, and then the worst will follow."

Jack had great difficulty in controlling his impatience, but yet he was not so entirely carried away as to be deaf to Blueskin's words.

He heard them, and he knew the importance of avoiding all suspicion, and he at once moderated his speed.

"You are right," he said; "and now about this inn where you say you left her. Is it far from here?"

"Not very far."

"Are you sure you can find it?"

"Oh yes! Although I was only in Amsterdam a little while, I took good notice of all around me, and there is no fear of my missing my way."

In a few minutes Blueskin paused before the little inn that was kept by the Widow Graacht.

He led Jack into the interior, and then pronounced the password which had been given him by Ned Cantle.

"Those you want are not here," said the old woman.

"Not here!" ejaculated Jack Sheppard, in a voice of the deepest disappointment.

"I scarcely expected they would be. When did they leave?"

"On Sunday morning."

"Have you heard from them since?"

"No."

"But you can tell us where they are."

"Oh yes; they are in a cottage, which is built upon the borders of a wood!"

"Is it far from here?"

"Half a day's journey if you travel on foot, and Ned Cantle left word that you were not to think of proceeding in any other manner."

"We will obey him. But where is this wood?"

"It would be impossible to direct you to it."

"What is to be done?"

"I have a boy here—my son. He knows the place well, and will guide you to it in safety. He knows every inch of the ground."

"He shall be well rewarded for his trouble!"

"Thanks, sir—thanks. He will soon be ready. But you had better take some refreshment, for the way is lonely, and you will have no opportunity of getting anything on the road."

Our friends were not troubled with much appetite, but they took the hint, and ordered some refreshment, of which they sparingly partook.

In about half an hour the widow entered the room.

She was followed by as singular a specimen of humanity as our friends had ever beheld.

"Come forward, Lubeck!" she said.

The elfish-looking boy who answered to the name of Lubeck stepped forward as he was bidden.

He was much deformed, and looked like some gnome from the bowels of the earth; such a creature as German authors love to describe in their wild legendary stories, and their artists to delineate.

His face had an evil, treacherous look, and our friends were consequently far from prepossessed in his favour.

But they had confidence in the landlady.

"You mustn't mind my poor boy's looks," she said, as if she read his thoughts. "He can't help being as he is, and he will guide you faithfully."

"I do not doubt it," said Blueskin, "and I can promise him a liberal reward for his trouble."

The boy's eyes gleamed as he heard these words, and he said, in an unearthly, guttural voice:

"I am ready!"

Blueskin and Jack both started instantly to their feet.

"So are we!" they cried.

They settled with the landlady, and then took their departure.

Their strange guide led them through many back streets in the poorest quarter of Amsterdam.

At last, however, the city was left behind, and they commenced that long journey across the flat, open country, which we have already described when Ned Cantle and Edgworth Bess took the same route.

Like her, they had to rest several times, for the journey was a very fatiguing one.

There was no splendid scenery to distract the attention and so make the walk less tedious.

At last, however, they came in sight of the wood we have previously mentioned, and then the elfin boy Lubeck raised one of his disproportioned arms, and pointed towards it.

"There is the wood," he said. "Behold our destination! The hut to which I am taking you, and in which your friends now are, is on the borders of it, and we shall soon be there."

CHAPTER CCCCLVII.

JONATHAN WILD ENTERS HIS RUINED HOUSE AND MEETS WITH A SURPRISE.

ONCE again let us revert to the proceedings of that bold, bad man, Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker.

What we have to relate concerning him is of the most interesting character, and cannot fail to arrest the attention of the reader.

Although we have been for such a long time occupied with other matters, it will be remembered that when we last heard of him was on the occasion of Jack Sheppard's execution.

After he had seen the body of his detested adversary placed in the rude coffin, and the lid shut down upon it, he believed, and reasonably too, that all further trouble was at end so far as he was concerned.

Accordingly he had left the cart, and had made his way to London.

Of late he had totally neglected his own affairs, and he knew full well that they required immediate attention.

In order that his pet scheme should be carried out, we have seen how he voluntarily confined himself to Jack's cell, and that too, at a time when his presence was most needed abroad.

"Yes—yes!" he muttered, as he strode rapidly along the road, "now that that little affair is over, I must turn my attention to other things. My house! Ten thousand curses on them for having destroyed it as they have! How can I tell what secrets the ravages of the fire may have revealed, and how can I tell by what prying eyes they have been seen? Curses—curses!"

Jonathan Wild clenched his teeth tightly together, and hastened on.

But he could not control himself, and so he went on muttering as before, for he fancied this was a relief to his thoughts.

"There are secrets, such as would bring me—even me—to the gallows—to Tyburn Tree, should they be discovered and made known. I have run a risk—a frightful risk; but I must make up for it as well as I can by being extra careful!"

He was silent again, and this time for a long period.

"How is it," he said, with snarling accents—"how is it I don't feel half so happy—half so overjoyed as I thought I should? and yet—yet—why shouldn't I? Jack Sheppard is hanged! I have accomplished my purpose! What I swore to do I have performed! Why, then, do I feel so strangely? I am not half so happy as I thought I should be! Why hasn't it made me happy?"

He stamped angrily on the ground, as he asked himself this question.

It was quite true.

He was not so rejoiced as he always imagined he should be.

In fact, he was not happy at all. He was in a state of feverish excitement, and his heart trembled with a dread of he knew not what.

"What feeling is this which comes over me?" he broke forth. "What is the meaning of it? What does it portend? Is something going to happen? No—no, that is foolish! All is well—of course all is well—all must be very well!"

But although he spoke thus, Wild could not persuade himself that all was indeed well.

He dreaded something vaguely, but what he knew not.

Wild was superstitious, and such a sensation as we have described coming over him would produce a great effect.

He trembled and shook, and even his very lips turned white.

Yet he could find no specific or sufficient cause to which he could attribute this alarm.

"I am a fool," he cried, "to give way to such feelings! It is my long sojourn in the cell which has been the cause of this. It is a sort of weakness which has come over me.

In a little while it will wear off—of course it will wear off! That is the cause. I will think about it no longer. I will turn my thoughts in quite a different direction!"

This was a wise resolution, but unfortunately for his own peace of mind, Jonathan Wild found himself unable to keep it.

The nameless dread of he knew not what hung over him, and would make itself manifest in spite of all his efforts.

The nearer he got to London, indeed, the more did this feeling seem to increase.

It would almost seem as though some portion of his inner nature was conscious that some misfortune was about to happen.

Jonathan Wild kept on, though all the way he was continually employed in muttering to himself.

"What can be wrong?" he asked himself, for about the thousandth time. "What is there for me to dread? Nothing, nothing—of course there is nothing; and I am a fool? Have I not seen Jack Sheppard dangling at the end of a rope—have I not seen him cut down, and his carcass put into the coffin? Of course I have, so that is all right! And what else is there—what else is there, I say?"

The question was asked fiercely, but no one replied to it.

"All is easy now—all is very easy! First of all, I will put my house in order, and see that all is right in that quarter, and take such measures as will prevent any disagreeable discoveries from being made. Then, when I have done that, how easy will be the rest, now that that son of the devil Jack Sheppard is for ever out of my way!"

Wild grew easier.

"That is the proper view to take of things; and my health is not quite what I should wish it to be, and that will account for the rest. I shall soon be better. One bold stroke is all that I have to make, and then I shall be at rest. I feel that I want rest, and then I shall have it. Surely fortune favours me to the utmost. I have wealth, and when I have achieved my grand aim, I will quit this active life and live in peace!"

Jonathan Wild was fast reasoning himself into a more comfortable state of mind.

By the time he reached London, he was comparatively calm, though now he blamed himself for having given way to his feelings in the way he had.

The finishing touch was put to his composure when he entered a public-house and called for a pint of brandy.

The landlord was rather surprised to receive such an order, but he put the fiery liquor before his customer in a pewter measure.

Jonathan threw down a piece of money to pay for it, and the landlord said:

"Water, Mr. Wild?"

"No, curse you, there's water enough in it already!"

The thief-taker raised the brandy to his lips as he spoke, and drank at least half of it off at a draught.

The landlord stared, and handed Wild his change, but he did not venture to make any remark, for he knew that his customer's temper was not to be depended upon.

Wild drank the brandy and sallied out into the open air.

"Ha!" he said, "that's better. I feel new life in me. It is wonderful what a difference a little drop of brandy always makes to me! I feel equal now to any emergency!"

The thief-taker strode through the streets, going straight in the direction of his own house.

He made up his mind to see that all was right in that quarter before he thought of anything else.

At last he reached Newgate Street.

He crossed over to the pavement opposite to his own dwelling; and then, placing his back against a door, he took a minute survey of his premises, and noted the extent of the destruction which had been wrought by the fire.

He soon found that little more than the shell of the building remained.

The walls were standing, but the windows were all gone, and the roof had wholly disappeared.

The thief-taker uttered a volley of curses when he saw the wreck before him, for he knew what a many valuable articles he had secreted in various parts of the house, and



[THE FOREST BANDITTI BREAK INTO THE COTTAGE IN WHICH EDGWORTH BESS HAS TAKEN REFUGE.]

which had doubtless been now destroyed by the fire, or else stolen from the ruins.

It was some satisfaction, however, for him to perceive how carefully the lower windows and doorway were boarded over so as to prevent impertinent intrusion.

"I owe the Governor some thanks for that!" he said.

"He really rendered me important service in this matter! I will not forget him for it!"

Jonathan Wild looked across and saw a police officer near the doorway.

"All is well!" he said, as soon as he caught sight of him—"all is well, and I have nothing to fear! No discovery has been made, and I will soon put things all right! I sha'n't care then!"

Jonathan Wild crossed over the street.

As he did so—it was very strange—but he experienced a degree of reluctance for which he could not account.

He was half inclined to give up his project once; and No. 96.—BLUESKIN.

then, with a curse upon the return of his former weakness, he determined to master the feeling and proceed.

The police officer recognised Wild, and saluted him.

"So you have come back, Mr. Wild, at last!" he said—"I have had a weary time of it!"

"Never mind! I will make that all right with you!" said the thief-taker, assuming as gentle a tone of voice as he possibly could—"have you been disturbed?"

"Not at all, Mr. Wild!"

"I am glad to hear that! I will relieve you of your duty shortly! I wish to enter!"

"All right, Mr. Wild!"

The front door of the thief-taker's house had been secured with a padlock and chain.

The key of the former the officer drew from his pocket, and, inserting it into the keyhole, released the chain.

The door now opened to a touch.

"Shall I enter with you, Mr. Wild?"

"No—no! You have had a long watch of it! I will take care of the place for awhile. Here—take this, and get yourself something to drink."

"Thanks, Mr. Wild—many thanks!"

The police officer touched his hat and withdrew.

The thief-taker gently pushed open the door of his abode and glided in like a ghost.

He closed the door behind him instantly, and then, in a half-defensive attitude, he stood gazing eagerly about him.

The walls of the different apartments on the ground floor were only partially destroyed, and were standing in many places.

Jonathan gazed suspiciously about him, for the same feeling of dread again attacked him.

But he could see nothing; and the silence of the very grave itself prevailed in that ruined dwelling.

"I am getting a fool!" he said—"an arrant fool! I tremble and start, and fear a thousand dangers for which there is no foundation! I am weak! That is it—that must be it—or I should never feel as I do now!"

Wild trembled like a leaf.

His teeth chattered, and his eyes rolled wildly in their sockets.

The day was fast coming to a close, and in that gloomy house darkness appeared already to have commenced her reign. Confusing shadows lay here and there upon the ground, and the corners were filled with dim black masses of nothingness.

"I must be quick!" Wild said, at length—"I must be quick, and do what I have to do, or night will come upon me, and I should require a light, which would betray me!"

But still he did not move, and his limbs shook more violently than ever.

He glared around him apprehensively, and almost dreaded to see Jack Sheppard advance towards him.

The ghastly, horrible, distorted face which he had beheld when he looked into the cart was still vividly before his mental vision.

A faint noise struck upon his ear.

He started violently, and a cry of alarm came from his lips.

"Help!—help!" he cried. "What is that?"

His heart beat violently, and he gasped for breath in his painful attempt to listen intently.

But the noise, whatever it was, ceased as quickly as it arose, and the same tomb-like silence filled the house.

And yet what a miserable prey he was to a thousand fears!

That was some portion of his punishment which, although he knew it not, was about to begin.

By one of those efforts which Jonathan Wild was above all men capable of making, he recovered his composure.

"Why should I be terrified?" he said, in a whisper. "Is this fear? Have I turned coward? No—no! I am unnerved a little—that is all—that is all! I am close to the street! I am all right enough! It was some trifling noise unworthy of notice! I am calm now! Let me begin! The sooner I get done the better it will be!"

With these words Jonathan Wild stepped along the passage of his ruined house.

It was his intention to proceed to the entrance to the cells, in the first place in order to ascertain whether the entrance had been laid open, and in the second to descend into their subterranean depths.

Accordingly he made his way in that direction. Gloomy and dark as the place was, he could find his way without difficulty.

"It will soon be over!" he said. "I will carefully conceal all traces of what has been! All must be destroyed, then I shall feel myself safe, and shall not care what happens, but until then, I —,"

He ceased suddenly.

There was a rapid rush of footsteps, and the next moment Jonathan Wild was held tightly in the grasp of several men.

CHAPTER CCCLVIII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS FIND IT NO EASY TASK TO CAPTURE JONATHAN WILD.

In a former chapter we have stated that a warrant for the apprehension of Jonathan Wild had been placed in the

hands of an experienced officer, and that, as soon as he received it, he at once made inquiries relative to the whereabouts of Jonathan Wild, and learned that he had accompanied the procession to Tyburn.

This police officer knew Jonathan Wild well, and therefore was aware that it would not be the easiest matter in the world to capture him.

A desperate resistance might be absolutely counted upon.

The police officer, too, had a certain amount of dread of Wild's powers, which he imagined to be much greater than they really were.

But past circumstances would easily account for the presence in his breast of such a feeling.

Under these circumstances, then, he felt that the only chance of success he had lay in taking his enemy at a disadvantage.

How this was to be done was a question that demanded and received his immediate attention.

He bestowed a considerable period of time in anxious thought, but without arriving at any definite result.

He wanted to arrange some plan by which he could take Wild by surprise, so that he and his men could pounce upon their prey suddenly, and, before he recovered himself, make him securely a prisoner.

For a long time he was baffled as to the means by which this could be done.

At last he bethought himself of Wild's house, and then his eyes sparkled.

"I have it at last!" he ejaculated. "Almost the first thing he will do will be to return to his house. I will hide myself and my comrades among the ruins; we shall then be able to take him by surprise without fail. He would never dream of our being there! I will try the experiment, and if he does not come, I can do something else to-morrow!"

The officer carried out his plan.

He called his men about him, and took up his quarters in Wild's house.

It was the easiest thing in the world for him to gain admittance, for, it will be remembered, it was a police officer who kept guard, and he was let into the secret of what was going to take place.

We have seen already how well he carried out his task.

Jonathan Wild's suspicions were not in the least degree excited by him.

Was it the dim shadow of this danger which cast its influence upon the thief-taker?

It seemed as though he was warned of what was about to happen.

Disregarding these premonitions, however, he had persisted in going forward.

The police officers were concealed behind a wall, and as soon as the thief-taker came in sight they sprang out upon him.

"You are my prisoner, Jonathan Wild!" said the chief police officer. "It is useless to resist, for you are trapped, and cannot escape! Surrender, then, at discretion!"

For about a second Jonathan Wild seemed as though turned to stone, standing just in the same attitude as when the officers had seized him.

It took that period of time for him to recover from the shock, but it also sufficed to enable him to comprehend the full and utmost extent of his danger.

He was equal to the emergency.

Now that the danger which had been impending over him took a definite and tangible shape, he lost all that irresolution which had characterised his previous movements.

"What?" he said, in a voice that made the whole place ring again.

"You are my prisoner!"

"Upon what charge?"

"Receiving stolen goods."

"Bah!"

"And other things connected with discoveries which have been made among the ruins of and beneath your house."

Jonathan uttered a yell of dismay.

These words let him know that he had to fear the worst.

Knowing as he did the full extent of his own guilt, he

imagined that the officers had found out more than they really had.

His was a guilty conscience, and it needed no accuser. The charge of receiving stolen property was, he felt convinced, a mere *ruse* to obtain possession of his body.

Once imprisoned, other charges would be brought against him.

"Game's up!" he said.

"It is," said the police officer in command, and you will see the advisability of giving in without making a fuss."

"Never!" cried Wild, with startling loudness.

At the same moment, by a tremendous and sudden exercise of strength, he freed himself from the grasp of the men, who had been thrown off their guard to some extent by his pacific demeanour.

But he was only free for a minute or two.

The men recovered themselves, it might be said, immediately, and rushed at him again.

"Beware!" shouted the chief—"beware, Jonathan Wild!—my orders are to capture you dead or alive!"

Wild made no reply.

He had a slight advantage, and he made the most of it.

He drew a pistol from his belt and fired it, but he took no aim, and the bullet struck harmlessly against the blackened wall beyond.

Grasping the weapon tightly in his hand, however, he laid about him with right good will.

But it was wrested from his grasp.

Still he continued to struggle, and he now appeared to gain fresh strength each moment.

Seizing the chief police officer by the collar, he struck him heavily with his clenched fist.

At the third blow he released his hold upon his throat and the officer fell groaning to the ground.

One enemy being thus disposed of, it follows that he had one less to contend with.

He served another in a similar way, and then Wild saw that three only remained.

These, however, were shouting loudly for additional assistance, and Wild felt that unless he overcame his enemies speedily, all chance of escape would be lost.

Therefore he summoned to his aid all the energies which he possessed, and the attack which he made upon his three assailants could not be withstood.

Jonathan succeeded in getting one arm at liberty.

It was his right.

With the rapidity of lightning, he drew his heavy hanger and dealt most furious sweeping blows with it, so that his foes fell before him like reeds.

The last bit the dust just as the front door was dashed open.

A single glance showed the thief-taker that a large and fresh party of officers were outside, or rather in the act of rushing in.

His heart sank a little as he reflected that the house was probably surrounded at all points.

But Jonathan was not the man to give up hopes of escape upon such grounds as these.

His eye happened to alight upon a piece of timber which projected from the wall, and which he fancied he could reach, if he gave a vigorous leap.

No sooner did the thought occur to him than he gave an upward spring.

His fingers clasped the blackened beam, and then, by an exercise of strength and agility, which no one would have believed him to possess, and which probably were only called forth by the urgency of the occasion, the thief-taker drew himself up.

The top of a wall was now within his reach, and on to this he sprang with a swiftness that was truly surprising.

In the twinkling of an eye he seemed to have gained his present situation.

Still he could not see how he was to escape.

What he had done was merely upon the prompting of the moment, and not from deliberation.

He was conscious only of one feeling, and that was to get as far away from his foes as he possibly could.

The darkness was in his favour, for during the last few moments night had deepened quickly.

Still the fresh body of officers which had entered caught sight of Jonathan's dim figure perched on the wall.

"Surrender!" cried some one. "Surrender this instant, or I fire!"

These words only seemed to stimulate Jonathan to fresh exertions, and hazing a frightful leap, he clung to another beam of wood which was burned almost through.

It cracked most ominously beneath his feet, and a rush of blood came before the thief-taker's eyes as he believed he was about to fall.

But the wood sustained his weight, and he gained a point a little higher up.

To those below he seemed to be climbing up the face of the wall, and many held their breaths, for they expected each moment that he would fall headlong to the ground.

The officer who had threatened to fire was as good as his word.

As soon as he saw that Wild paid no sort of attention to his words, he raised his pistol rapidly, and aiming as well as he could at the dusky form above him, pulled the trigger.

The report rang out clearly and sharply, and some fragments of masonry which had been dislodged from their position by the concussion of the air came tumbling about their ears.

Jonathan felt something like a sharp stroke with a stick.

He knew what it was, for he had been shot at more than once.

It almost threw him off his balance, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he saved himself.

The bullet had struck the back of his neck, but had bounded off without inflicting much injury.

Still the shot was well aimed, for it was within a few inches of his brain.

Wild got up higher still, and his form was almost invisible to those below.

"Follow him, my men—follow him! Don't let the villain escape!" cried the chief police officer, who at this moment partially recovered from the effects of the stunning blows in the face which Wild had given him.

The officers looked irresolute for a moment, and then one of them sprang up and caught hold of the beam in the same manner as the thief-taker had done.

From here he gained the wall.

He was quickly followed by several others, and they scrambled up the almost bare walls like so many wild cats.

But Wild had severely tried the strength of the ruins, and now, without a moment's notice, the wall gave way and precipitated the officers to the earth.

The fragments of masonry and their bodies as well fell upon their comrades below.

A loud, mocking laugh came from above.

Wild had observed the discomfiture of his foes, and continued to climb upwards with rapidity.

He was beginning to hope that after all he should get off.

The confusion below was something terrific.

Not only were the officers injured who had fallen, but those who were below had been more seriously injured still, and there was scarcely one out of their whole number who had escaped without a bruise of some sort.

But this defeat only made them all the more determined to achieve their purpose; and having scrambled to their feet, they looked about them for their foe.

A hideous, screeching laugh greeted them, and then something came crashing down.

They all drew back, but only some escaped.

A huge beam of wood had been hurled down from above.

Again came the hideous, yelling laugh.

Looking upward, they could just see the form of the thief-taker about on a level with the roof of the adjacent house.

"This way," cried the officer in command—"this way! I was a fool not to think of it before. Let us hasten to the next house—we shall then gain the roof in no time!"

A disorderly shout was the result, and then as many as were able to do so followed their chief into the street.

They experienced some delay in gaining admission to the next house, but upon explaining their errand they were allowed to ascend.

But altogether, so much time had been lost, that the officers feared Jonathan Wild would have too good a start of them to be overtaken.

In spite of this, however, they pressed forward with as much speed as they could.

CHAPTER CCCCLIX.

JONATHAN WILD MAKES SOME FRANTIC EFFORTS TO
ESCAPE FROM THE POLICE OFFICERS.

AFTER incurring a thousand and one perils—after missing a full several times by the merest chance in the world—Jonathan Wild reached the roof of the adjoining house.

What must have been the feelings of that bold, bad man on this eventful night!

What must he have thought of this sudden reverse of fortune? Ho who had for so long kept like a bloodhound on the trail of others, was at last a fugitive himself!

Now he was being hunted for his life, as he had hunted many and many a poor creature.

To escape, he was obliged to run the most awful risks; and, after all, it seemed very doubtful whether he would be able to get wholly free.

It was an appropriate retribution to overtake him.

What could be more fitting than that he who had hunted so many should come at last to be hunted himself?

Perhaps Jonathan Wild did not feel the reverse of fortune so keenly as one might imagine, although it had assailed him in the very hour of his success, at the time when he imagined he should be freed from all further trouble.

On his way back from Tyburn, he was congratulating himself—despite the uneasiness of his mind—upon the fruition of his plans.

In planning his future operations, he little dreamed that in so short a space of time, instead of being able to effect his purpose, he should be a fugitive, with all the police force at his back.

And yet he could not have wholly blinded himself to such a contingency.

He must have been aware that such a thing was likely to take place at some time or other.

Therefore—when the first shock of his astonishment was over—when he saw how things stood—he fully realised his position, and knew what he had to expect.

Nevertheless, coming upon him as it did at the moment of his triumph, or when he thought the way was plain and clear before him, it must have been a deep and bitter disappointment.

It was a disappointment; and as he sprang from beam to beam and from wall to wall, like some hunted animal, such awful curses came from his lips as would have appalled the heart of even the most hardened.

It is a wonder that the very walls did not fall upon him and crush him.

He called down the most awful maledictions upon the heads of his pursuers.

What pleasure it would have given him if he could have killed them all at one blow!

He made this reflection when he reached the top of his house.

As the thought was passing through his mind, he happened to seize hold of a beam which was very loose.

Indeed, it is a wonder his weight did not pull it from its setting. Such would have been the case had the strain been continued, but Wild let go and clung to the wall.

But the looseness of the beam furnished him with an idea.

He had been wishing for the destruction of his foes, and now the means of inflicting serious, if not fatal, injuries upon them were within his reach.

He fixed himself upon the wall above as firmly as he could, and set to work to disengage the beam from its position.

While so employed he heard the fall of the wall.

At this sound his heart rejoiced.

Some of his enemies had come to grief, as their groans and cries fully proved.

This encouraged him in his task.

He looked down.

He could see nothing, for the interior of his house was as dark as a well.

Darkness had even settled upon the house-tops.

He was deprived of the satisfaction which it would have given him could he but have seen the exact amount of injury which had been done.

In less than a moment the beam was loose enough to be removed.

He balanced it for a moment, and then let go.

Down it fell with a crash that gladdened his ears to listen to, and then shouts and cries followed, which was proof enough that it had wrought the effect upon the police officers below which he hoped and expected it would.

So overjoyed was he at this double triumph—for so he considered it—that he could not avoid giving vent to his exultation in that hideous, unmirthful laugh which had so plainly reached the ears of the officers.

Although he had triumphed, Jonathan Wild did not lose sight of the necessity which existed for promptitude of action.

Fain would he have lingered and feasted his ears with the cries which came from below, but the gratification would be too dearly purchased at the price he would be obliged to pay for it.

Reluctantly then, as we may say, he crawled on to the roof of the house adjoining his own.

Where he should go to—where he should fly for refuge and safety, he had no idea.

In the hour of his prosperity he had not troubled himself to bind many friends to him; on the contrary, he had used the power which had been vested in him in a manner that had created enemies by thousands.

Of late, he had received plenty of proof that he was not by any means a popular favourite; and if any proof had been wanted of this, the behaviour of the mob that morning, as he rode in the cart with Jack Sheppard on the way to Tyburn, would have been sufficient.

On the contrary, he was an object of general dislike.

The people did not scruple to show their aversion for him even when he was in a position of power; and, when they once found he was falling, every hand would be raised against him to strike him to the earth.

Jonathan Wild felt all this as, at the hazard of his neck, he crawled over the slippery tiles, and curses against the whole human race issued from his lips.

He felt that he hated every one who lived, from oldest to youngest—he hated them more bitterly than even he himself was hated.

There was something else in Wild's favour besides the darkness of the night.

He was perfectly familiar with all that was around him—he knew the roof of every house, and the people who lived beneath.

He passed rapidly from roof to roof, without attempting to pause.

"I must get further off," he said; "to attempt to enter any of these houses would be dangerous to a degree. The street is doubtless closely watched, and I should be pounced upon the moment I emerged. No—no! I must go further—further!"

Muttering these words, and mingling all he said with blasphemous curses, he crawled steadily onward, clinging to the tiles with a grasp of surprising tightness.

But, in the course of his long and adventurous career, Jonathan Wild often had occasion to pass at a rapid speed over the tops of houses when he was in pursuit of any desperate character, and by so doing he had gained a certain amount of practice which at the present juncture did him good service.

From time to time he looked back, and presently he saw the reflection of a ruddy light.

The police officers had gained the roofs, and had furnished themselves with torches, in order that they might see better to hunt the fugitive.

Jonathan ground his teeth with rage.

The sight of the officers caused him to redouble his speed.

The loud shouts and cries which came from the rear made him fancy that they were gaining upon him, but this was not the case, and it was only his excited fancy which made him think so.

At last he reached that part of Newgate Street where Warwick Lane branches off at a right angle.

The turning was narrow, but in his exhausted state Wild felt that it would be foolish to risk a jump.

It would not do to remain there, however, and so he turned off down the street, going in the direction of Newgate Market.

In a little while he reached the place where, of course, the houses ceased.

What was he to do now?

His enemies were close behind him and pressing forward eagerly.

If he hesitated they would come up with him.

He crept to the very verge of the abyss and looked down.

Below him, but as it seemed at a frightful depth, was the top of the stone archway which forms one of the entrances to the market.

Could he but reach the archway, his position would of course be much improved, since then he would have an opportunity of reaching the ground.

But this seemed an utter impossibility.

The loud report of a pistol came upon his ears at this moment, and made him aware that he was seen.

The bullet whistled past his ear in very uncomfortable proximity.

This was an inducement to him to try any desperate expedient he might be able to think of.

He could see dimly the top of the stone archway below him.

It was broad, and he fancied he might be able to alight upon it.

At any rate he must make the effort. He had but two alternatives, either to fall into the hands of his foes, or to run the risk of getting down.

The latter was preferable, though it seemed certain death.

Cautiously Jonathan Wild lowered himself over the abyss, and hung down at the full length of his arms, his weight being sustained by the tight grasp which he kept upon the parapet with his hands.

Then he looked down.

The top of the stone arch was just below him.

It was exactly under his feet.

But if he dropped upon it, should he be able to maintain his balance?

Would he not be more likely to rebound, and be unable to save himself from falling into the street below?

That seemed most probable.

He felt about for something to take hold of, supporting his weight by one hand only.

He was fortunate enough to encounter a small projection in the brickwork of the house.

He did not know whether it would be sufficient to sustain his weight, but nevertheless he grasped it tightly, and let go his hold upon the parapet.

He was now much nearer to the archway than he had been, and no longer hesitated about letting go his hold, though it was fraught with the utmost danger.

His heart turned sick when he let go, but almost before he had time to experience the sensation, he felt himself fall with tremendous force upon the stonework.

As he had from the first expected, the force with which he fell caused him to rebound.

He struggled desperately, and made frantic efforts to take hold.

But the smooth stonework eluded his fingers—they could not close upon it.

He felt he was falling.

He was on the balance.

He made another furious effort, and succeeded in hooking his leg, near the knee, over the stonework.

How convulsively he exercised those muscles!

But he was saved.

He hung down head foremost, and there was nothing to save him from falling except the hold which he had happened to take with that one leg.

He endeavoured to raise himself, and get into a less dangerous position.

For a long time he was unsuccessful, but at last he got astride over the archway.

He crouched down on the stones as close as he could, and embraced it convulsively, for a gleam of light came from above.

He turned his head and looked up.

The police officers were standing on the parapet of the house, waving their torches and endeavouring to peer into the abyss.

"There he is—there he is!" said a loud voice.

"Where—where?"

"I can just see him on the top of the archway over New-gate Market!"

"How could he have got there?"

"D—d if I know! There he is!"

"Fire at him—fire—fire!"

The police officers did not need twice telling.

CHAPTER CCCCLX.

THE POLICE OFFICERS CONTINUE THEIR HUNT AFTER JONATHAN WILD.

THEY could all see the dusky figure lying on the rather lighter-coloured stonework, and aiming their pistols they fired.

It was an irregular dropping volley, and the report of so many fire-arms raised strange reverberations in the neighbourhood.

"He's down! he's down!" was the next cry. "He's hit!"

The first part of this speech was correct, the latter was not.

As soon as he found that he was seen, Jonathan gave up the attempt to conceal himself upon the stonework.

At the risk of his neck, he moved and began to scramble down.

Could he but reach the iron gates all would be well, because they would afford him many a hand and foot hold.

But he was destined not to do so.

His hand slipped, and he fell heavily to the ground.

He reached the pavement with a dull crash, which the officers on the house-top heard plainly enough.

It was this that made them cry out, "He's down!"—and naturally enough they imagined that the thief-taker had been wounded.

It so happened, however, that not one of the bullets had touched him, which is not very remarkable, considering the darkness of the night, and consequently the difficulty of taking anything like an accurate aim.

The force of the fall knocked all the breath out of Wild's body, and for a moment or two he laid just where he had fallen quite senseless and apparently dead.

Soon, however, signs of life manifested themselves.

With the first sensations of returning animation, Jonathan Wild recollected his peril, and he endeavoured to rise to his feet.

He was terribly bruised, but he believed no bones were broken.

In a little while he found this to be correct, and he stood at his full height, gasping painfully for breath.

He was much hurt, but he bore the pain with the stoicism of an Indian when he was sure his bones were entire.

It was necessary, however, that he should take speedy steps to escape, or the officers would be upon him, for, upon looking up once more, he saw that they had abandoned the roof.

They had one and all hastened to descend when they found that the fugitive had fallen from the archway into the street.

But they had too much respect for their own persons to attempt to follow by the route he had taken.

Finding how still he lay, they believed there was no need for such great speed, though for all that, they lost no time in getting down into the street.

They entered one of the houses close at hand, which happened to have a window opening upon the tiles.

To descend the stairs and pass out of the front door took, of course, but a very little while.

Still it was long enough for Wild to recover from his state of unconsciousness, to rise to his feet, and to look about him for some place of concealment, for he felt that his powers were not equal to running a race.

His pursuers would easily overtake him.

He was afraid to enter the market, lest he should encounter anyone, and if they once heard he was within the enclosure it would be quickly converted into a kind of trap, for nothing would be easier than to surround it at every point of exit.

There was a doorway nearly apposite—it was a large, old-fashioned one, and he fancied he might conceal himself within it.

He could see no better hiding-place, so he crossed over and squeezed himself up in one corner.

"They will never think I have hidden here," he said.

"They will pass by without searching."

The doorway in which Wild took refuge on this

occasion was very old fashioned—such a one as would be sought for in vain at the present day.

It projected into the street like a porch, and there were seats in it, and a little window at each side.

Through one of these little windows Jonathan Wild peeped.

He saw the officers, torches in hand, sally forth from the house from the top of which Wild made such a perilous descent.

They ran in a moment to the spot where he had fallen, and their astonishment was unbounded when they found that he had disappeared.

It looked like magic, and one of the officers said:

“He must have the devil to aid him!”

“Pho, pho! He must be somewhere close at hand! After such a fall as that he cannot have got far away. Search about quickly and well! You will find that he has crawled into some corner or other!”

It was the commanding officer who spoke.

“Oh, if I could but take that man’s life,” groaned Wild, “I should feel content!”

In obedience to the commands which they had just received, the officers dispersed themselves, and, holding their torches low down on the ground, commenced a rigid examination of every corner.

Wild felt that if he continued where he was he was as good as captured already.

But where could he go? How could he improve his position?

A faint noise attracted his attention.

He knew in an instant what it was.

Some one was removing the fastening, and was about to open the door close to which he stood.

He almost held his breath, and then a bold plan of action at once suggested itself to his mind.

He pressed himself close against the door.

As soon as the latch was raised he glided in like a spectre, and closed the door behind him.

It was a girl who opened the door.

Wild saw that at a glance.

Before she could give vent to the scream which was trembling on her lips, the thief-taker dashed his hand violently before her mouth, and stifled it.

“Silence!” he said, in a hoarse whisper—“silence! If you utter a sound I’ll twist your head off!”

The girl dropped down in the passage as though shot.

She was so terrified that she swooned outright.

“What’s the matter?” said a voice.

The door of a room was opened, and a man projected his head into the passage.

The darkness confused him, and he could not see Wild.

But the thief-taker could see this man, for a faint light came through the partially-opened door.

“What’s the matter?” said the voice again. “What is it?”

Wild was afraid that this man would push his inquiries further, so he took a pistol from his belt, and, grasping it by the barrel, struck the man a violent blow on the head with it.

He fell heavily half in and half out of the room.

Wild kicked him until he was within, and then he closed the door.

He was afraid that an alarm would be raised by these summary proceedings, and he listened intently.

But all within the house was still.

Finding this to be the case, Wild hastened to the front door again.

He ran his hand over it hastily, and felt the key, which he turned at once.

A roaring sound came from the street, as though there were many people in it.

“I must be quick!” he said—“quick—quick! This will be no place for me! I must be off! When or where shall I find a refuge from my enemies?”

Wild was suffering excruciating pain, and he was so bruised that he could scarcely move.

The danger of remaining where he was, however, was imminent, and so, despite his agony, he crept along the passage in the hope of finding some means of exit.

A dozen steps took him to the stairs.

There were underground kitchens to the house, and Wild felt inclined to descend the stairs which led to them.

He leaned over the bannisters, and looked down.

He abandoned this project in an instant, for he saw a stream of light, and caught a glimpse of somebody ascend.

“But if I don’t think something’s going on above,” said this person. “I’ll go and see, at any rate!”

It was an old woman who spoke, and Wild saw she carried a candle, which apparently had only just been lighted, for the illumination was feeble, and threatened every moment to become extinct altogether.

She was shading the light with her hand, so that nearly all the beams fell full upon her countenance.

“Curse the hag!” Wild muttered. “I must stop her, or she will go peeping and prying about, and I shall have my foes at my heels directly!”

How to stop the old woman without creating an alarm was a problem.

She was rapidly nearing the top of the stairs, and Wild had not decided what he should do, when, all at once, his foot caught against a mat.

This gave him an idea, and furnished him with a means of getting rid of the old woman.

To pick up this mat, which was a large oakum one, took Wild about a second.

Poising it in the air, he leaned over the bannisters and flung it with full force against the old woman.

Her flickering candle was extinguished in a moment, and being herself thrown off her balance, she fell backwards down the stairs with a grand crash.

“That will do!” said Wild.

All was profoundly still when the old woman reached the bottom of the stairs.

No doubt she had fainted either from the effects of her fall or from terror—most likely from both causes combined.

Wild was satisfied that she was silent, and he stood for a moment deliberating what he should do next.

Should he go upstairs or down?

Bang, bang, bang!

Jonathan started each time.

Some one was at the front door knocking for admittance, and with a vigour, too, that would quickly call the attention of any persons who might happen to be in the house.

Wild uttered a volley of curses.

Of course those clamoring for admission could be no other than his foes.

By some means or other they must have tracked him to that house.

Without pausing to recollect that he had left no clue by which they could follow him, Wild sprang rapidly up the staircase.

He reached the first landing in an incredibly short space of time.

The terrific knocking still continued.

Wild wondered it did not rouse all the inmates of the dwelling, for it threatened to split the door from top to bottom.

Several doors opened from this landing, but he could not make up his mind to enter any one of the rooms into which they led.

But he perceived a window which looked out upon the back of the premises.

He pressed his face against the little latticed panes and looked out.

The roofs of some out-buildings were beyond, and he fancied he might escape by crawling along them.

No sooner did he think of this than he opened the window silently and slipped out.

He closed it after him as well as he could, for he was desirous not to leave any trace of the route he had taken if he could possibly avoid doing so.

He closed the window, then, but he could not fasten it. This was immaterial.

Wild looked down.

A few feet below him was a large water tank, one half of which was covered with lead.

On to this he dropped without difficulty, for the distance was insignificant.

Beyond was some kind of out-building, and beyond that a wall.

Jonathan Wild was not in very good condition for such work, but the exigency of his position compelled him to summon all his energies.

The out-building was passed in safety, and he got on to the wall beyond.

There further progress seemed impossible.

Below him was a small yard, and on the opposite side of it was the back of the house.

"I will descend," muttered the thief-taker, "and if I can only enter that house, and leave it unperceived, I fancy I shall have destroyed all clue. Then I shall be able to rest—to rest!"

CHAPTER CCCCLXI.

NED CANTLE AND EDGORTH BESS ARE BESIEGED IN THE COTTAGE BY BANDITTI.

EVENTS crowd upon us.

Now that the chief actors in our story are so widely separated from each other, it of course follows that we are obliged to describe in rotation the different accidents which befall them.

It becomes necessary now that we should direct our attention to the fortunes of Edgworth Bess.

Poor girl! she seemed to be the sport of a malignant destiny, for now, when she thought that for a time her troubles and persecutions would be over, they continued with unremitting severity.

So many incidents have been described since we last parted with her and her new friend Ned Cantle, that we feel it may be necessary to remind the reader that when we left them was after their long and tiresome journey from the city of Amsterdam.

They had been walking for many hours, and Edgworth Bess was quite worn out.

She had been compelled to rest by the wayside many, many times.

At length, however, Ned Cantle raised his arm and pointed to a small cottage on the borders of a wood, which was just visible in the distance, and as he did so he communicated the welcome intelligence that they were within view of their destination.

This news cheered the fair traveller's drooping spirits, and infused fresh strength into her exhausted frame.

Now that the end of her journey was in sight, it was an encouragement to proceed, because every step she took she could see brought her nearer and nearer to a place of her refuge.

In his rough way, Ned Cantle cheered and encouraged her as well as he could.

Without the occurrence of any incident that is worth while for us to relate, the little cottage was reached.

But when she gained the threshold, Edgworth Bess felt as though she must sink to the ground, so greatly was she fatigued.

The cottage door was opened by a woman, whose personal appearance by no means prepossessed our heroine in her favour.

But she recognised Ned Cantle instantly, and a rapid sign was exchanged between them.

In a hoarse, grating voice the woman then desired them to enter, saying at the same time that they were welcome.

But Edgworth Bess disliked the tones of her voice, even more than she disliked the configuration of her countenance.

It was a large, flat, bloated-looking face, with an ugly apology for a nose stuck in the centre of it, and two small fiery-looking eyes.

She was tall and stout, and had a generally masculine appearance.

Her arms, which were bare almost to the shoulder, were very red, and were good specimens of the development of muscle.

She looked strong enough to fell an ox at one blow.

A general appearance of untidiness and dirt, however, was conspicuous, not only in her person, but in her attire, and in the cottage and its contents as well.

Indeed, it did not promise to be a very comfortable place to sojourn in, but Edgworth Bess consoled herself with the reflection, that if it was not comfortable it was safe.

She felt at last that she was beyond the power of Jonathan Wild, and that was almost all she cared for.

In a few words Ned Cantle explained to the woman the nature of his wishes, and as he had confidently expected, she immediately assented to their wish to take up their abode in the cottage for a little while.

A promise of liberal payment for her trouble had the effect of putting the woman in excellent humour, and she prepared a meal, which, if not so savoury as might be desired, was nevertheless welcome enough to the hungry travellers.

While they were discussing it, the door of the cottage was opened, and a man entered.

Ned Cantle recognised him in a moment, and a friendly greeting took place between them.

It was the husband of the woman who had entered, and so far as an unpleasant exterior was concerned they were an excellent pair.

He was a burly-looking man with large limbs.

His face was almost buried in hair.

His nose stood out from it, and was of a glowing red colour, while his forehead was so low as almost to be undistinguishable.

Like the woman, his eyes were red and fiery-looking.

Edgworth Bess gave one glance at the new comer, and then averted her eyes in disgust.

She could not conceal a slight shudder, although she tried hard to repress it, for the people, however sinister in appearance, were, she thought, disposed to be friendly towards her, and she could not afford to make them foes.

The man was willing enough to oblige Ned Cantle, and repeated the permission given by his wife, only he added, they could take up their quarters there as long as they liked, provided they paid well for it.

All this was very satisfactory, but still Edgworth Bess could not subdue the aversion which had sprung up in her mind on the contrary—in spite of her efforts it seemed to increase.

She pressed them to allow her to retire, and her request was at once attended to.

She was shown into a comfortable apartment.

She shivered as she threw herself upon the rude bed, and it was a long, long time indeed before sleep visited her eyelids.

But at last, thoroughly and entirely wearied out, she sank off to sleep, nor did she awake until the day was much advanced.

Ned Cantle and the occupier of the cottage sat conversing together until a late hour.

In the course of that conversation, Ned Cantle gave a partial account of the circumstances which had thrown him into the company of Edgworth Bess.

The man's eyes gleamed when Ned told him that he had with him more money than he should require to pay if he stayed there a twelvemonth.

At the same time he added, that in all probability their stay would be short—only a day or two, for Ned Cantle knew nothing of the state of affairs in England, and expected that Blueskin and Jack Sheppard would arrive in a day or two.

At last they retired; nor did they rise the next morning until a late hour.

After breakfast the man announced his intention of going out, and Ned Cantle started up to accompany him.

But Edgworth Bess felt such a horror of being left alone in the cottage along with the old woman, that she begged most earnestly that he would not leave her.

Ned Cantle seemed rather loth to give up his projected expedition; but he did so, and remained with Edgworth Bess.

The cottager set out alone.

That day and the next passed away smoothly enough.

On the morning following, Edgworth Bess ventured out alone.

She was longing for the appearance of her two protectors, and wondered what had caused them to be so late.

While at some distance from the cottage, she saw the cottager joined by three men on the borders of the wood.

Edgworth Bess shuddered as she beheld them, so repulsive and hideous was their appearance.

The four men conversed earnestly together, and pointed several times towards the hut; from which Edgworth Bess justly surmised that it formed the subject of their conversation.

At last they all disappeared among the trees.

Edgworth Bess had watched them throughout the whole of their conference, but they were so intently occupied that they did not see her.

When they were gone, she hastened to Ned Cantle, and told him all that she had seen.

The intelligence disturbed him; but he concealed as well as he could the apprehensions which filled his breast, for several circumstances had come under his own observation which had roused his suspicions.

He was careful, however, not to alarm Edgworth Bess, for it might turn out that his suspicions had no foundation.

He resolved, however, to keep a keen look-out upon everything.

Nothing was seen of the cottager during the whole of the day; and towards evening, when it was beginning to grow dusk, Ned urged Edgworth Bess to allow him to go upon a kind of reconnoitring expedition, with a view to ascertain whether they had any grounds for being afraid or not.

Reluctantly, Bess gave her permission.

Ned departed, but he was not long away.

When he returned, he found that the old woman had left the cottage during his absence.

At a glance, Edgworth Bess saw that Ned's countenance wore an anxious, uneasy expression, and she instantly feared the worst results would happen.

Ned, however, tried to cheer her spirits.

But he recollected that he had spoken somewhat incautiously about the amount of money he had in his possession, and that the cottager became greatly interested.

Ned knew him well, for their acquaintance had been of long standing.

He was aware that, although he professed to be a woodman, he in reality obtained his livelihood in a predatory manner, and in defiance of the laws.

But Ned trusted to that honour which is popularly supposed to exist between thieves.

Ned Cantle's suspicions were well founded.

Had he been so lucky as to have possessed a knowledge of the precise state of affairs, he would then and there have beat a retreat, and never have rested until he was far away.

But, with only his suspicions, it would have been unwise in the extreme to leave a place which had up to the present afforded them safe shelter, and might continue to do so.

The cottager would have been all right had he been ignorant that Ned Cantle carried with him such a large sum of money.

But the moment he possessed that knowledge he was a changed man.

He was in league with a gang of banditti, too, who infested the forest, and he was bound under a solemn oath to make his leader acquainted with the particulars of every chance of obtaining a good booty.

These banditti, with whom we are destined to become better acquainted ere long, had a secret hiding-place in the forest.

To this the cottager had repaired, and there had made a disclosure to his leader of the fact that a man and a girl had temporarily taken up their abode in his cottage, who possessed between them a large sum of money.

An attack was at once resolved on, and the night which followed the morning when Edgworth Bess saw the four men in consultation was fixed upon for the achievement of their purpose.

With these few words of explanation, we will return to our friends in the hut.

Finding that night was coming on, and that neither the man nor his wife made their appearance, Ned Cantle closed the door, and barricaded it as well as he was able.

His heart misgave him strangely, and he felt that something dreadful was about to happen.

Having secured the door, he went with Edgworth Bess to the upper storey of the house.

There were two rooms—one back and one front.

The latter commanded a view of the open country before the cottage.

The former looked on to the forest.

Ned Cantle stationed Edgworth Bess at the front window, and told her to be careful to conceal herself from the observation of anyone without, but, at the same time, to maintain a vigilant watch, and bade her call him in a moment if she saw anything peculiar or suspicious.

This done, he made his way to the back window.

By adopting this measure, he fancied he should ascertain whether or not his suspicions were justly founded, and also be prepared should any attack be made upon them.

The darkness was confusing, and Ned found that he could see but little.

Still, as he gazed down upon the ground, he fancied he could perceive shadowy figures gliding about.

The window was a latticed casement, and he determined to open it quietly to the extent of a couple of inches or so.

He would then be able to hear.

He did so.

He opened the window without making the least sound; but the moment he did so, the murmur of voices came upon his ears.

The voices were faint, and the speakers were evidently trying to speak as quietly as they could.

Ned strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, in the hope of being able to make out what was said.

But an occasional word spoken in a higher key, or with more emphasis than the rest, was all that reached him.

CHAPTER CCCCLXII.

THE BANDITTI MAKE AN ATTACK UPON THE COTTAGE, AND NED CANTLE MEETS WITH A MISFORTUNE.

This was an unsatisfactory state of things, for he was quite as badly off as before.

That the banditti meditated making an attack upon the hut was tolerably certain, but in what manner that attack would be made was more than Ned could tell.

Failing in his attempt to hear what was said, he next endeavoured to count the number of the banditti; but the darkness of the night and the manner in which they flitted about made this a difficult operation, for he was likely to fall into the error of counting them twice over.

After repeated trials, he became convinced that their number could not be less than seven.

This would be rather long odds for one man to contend against, who had no better place to stand a siege than a cottage composed of the fraillest materials.

And besides, the probability was that these seven men were not the whole of the force.

"I have no one to blame for this but myself," said Ned. "Had it not been for my stupidity in letting him know that I had a great deal of money, we should have been unmolested. It is all my own fault, and I deserve to be punished for my folly."

Ned Cantle reproached himself bitterly, but really it was an act of thoughtlessness such as almost anyone placed as he was would have been guilty of.

"It's no good!" he said. "I can't contend against such a gang as that. It's madness to think of such a thing. Seven to one is too long odds. However, I will not surrender easily. I will keep them at bay as long as I can, and perhaps I may keep them off until assistance arrives."

This was a forlorn hope, but Ned could console himself with no better.

He felt sure, however, that there was no more to be learned by remaining where he was, so he stole on tiptoe into the front room.

"Hush!" he said, in an impressive whisper.

Edgworth Bess was seated near the window, gazing anxiously out into the darkness.

But upon the entrance of Ned Cantle she started to her feet.

"What is amiss?" she said. "Tell me all; it will be better than leaving me to guess at it! I shall be sure to picture worse than the reality!"

"I will tell you," said Ned Cantle, "for you are brave, and ought to be made acquainted with your position. I must, then, admit that we are in a situation of extreme peril. At least seven men are collected at the back of the hut. They are conversing together, and no doubt intend to make an attack upon us!"

"Are they Wild's men?"

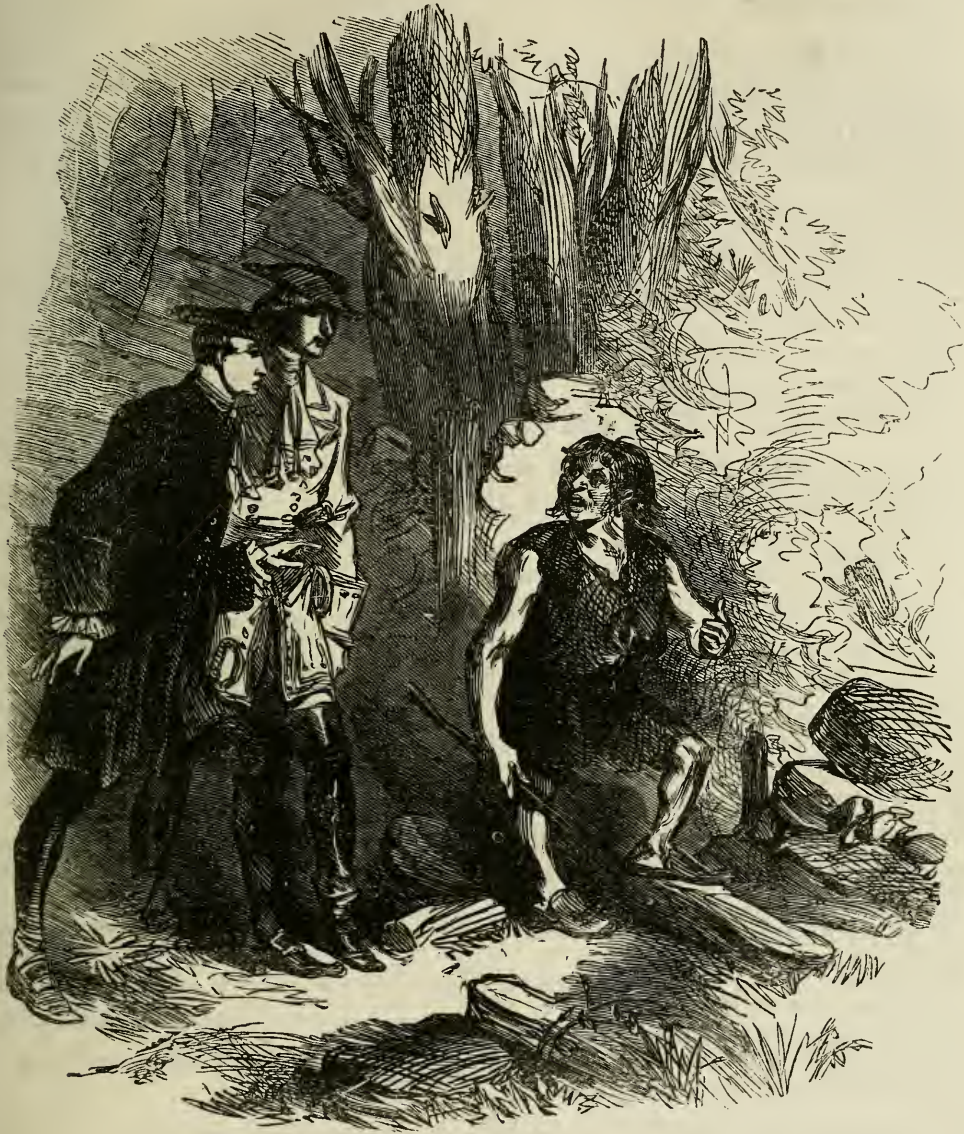
"Oh no!"

"Thank heaven for that!"

"They are German banditti."

"What can be their motive for the attack?—what have we done?"

"Why, we possess money, and they love it; and they



[BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD DISCOVER THE COTTAGE IN RUINS.]

have made up their minds to wrest it from us by main force."

"Alas—alas!"

"Do not despair! If they should make an attack upon us—and I can scarcely doubt it—I will keep them at bay as long as I have power to do so."

"But what chance can you have against so many?"

"Very little, I am afraid."

"Then why resist?"

"We might as well do so as surrender. If we are conquered, they can but plunder us after all."

"But they will be exasperated."

"I cannot help that. Blueskin and Jack Sheppard would both be angry if I allowed myself to be robbed without making an effort to defend myself."

"Would they were here!" moaned Edgworth Bess.

"And so say I," rejoined Ned Cantle, heartily; "but if you will believe me, I expect their arrival every moment;

No. 97.—BLUESKIN.

and if I can only keep these wretches off till they do come, all will be well!"

"Do you think that there is any likelihood of their appearing before morning?"

"I do. They ought to have been here before this."

"Then there is hope?"

"Oh yes!—believe me, there is!"

Edgworth Bess was silent for a moment, and then she said:

"Tell me, Ned, and tell me truly—do the money and valuables you have about you represent a large amount?"

"Yes; much more than either Jack or Blueskin could afford or would be willing to lose."

"If it had not been so much —"

"What?"

"I should have advised you to conciliate these men."

"It would have been useless. They would never have

been satisfied until they had wrested every penny from us."

"I hear nothing of them."

"No, nor I."

"Is not that strange?"

"I don't know what to make of it. Let us descend into the lower portion of the hut. It is just possible that we may then be able to learn something more."

Edgworth Bess willingly accompanied Ned Cantle, for she did not like to be alone and in darkness.

Upon reaching the lower room they listened.

No sound, however, of any alarming character came upon their ears.

A fresh thought occurred to Edgworth Bess.

Turning towards Ned, she exclaimed:

"I do not know whether you can inform me upon this point, but I am anxious to have it set at rest."

"What point?"

"The money and jewels in your possession. Blueskin gave them to you, did he not?"

"Yes."

"Do you know whence he procured them?"

"I do."

"Tell me then?" said Bess, anxiously.

"There's no harm in doing so that I see. If you must know, he took them out of old Jonathan Wild's house, and—"

Ned was interrupted by a cry of despair, which came from the lips of his listener.

Clasping her hands over her face, she burst into a flood of bitter tears.

Ned Cantle was puzzled, and as he gazed upon her his looks plainly expressed it.

He was rather alarmed at the violence of her grief, and was at a loss to know how he could soothe her.

"What has grieved you thus?" he said. "What have I done?"

"I understand all!" moaned Edgworth Bess. "I can comprehend the attack that is now about to be made. Had I known before what you have just told me I could almost have predicted it, or at any rate some similar misfortune!"

Ned Cantle looked at Edgworth Bess with the utmost astonishment, and well he might, for what she said was quite enigmatical to him.

"Explain yourself," he said, at length.

In a voice that was broken by sobs and choked by tears, she said:

"The curse of blood is on it—the curse of blood is on it! That money is accursed! We have had Jonathan Wild's money before, and it has always been the means of bringing us into difficulties. It is fate! While we have his gold, we shall have nothing but misery and misfortune—nothing—nothing! I can understand our suffering on the ocean now!"

Ned Cantle shook his head.

Like most men of his class, he was superstitious, but still he felt that he could not subscribe to such a belief as that.

But as for Edgworth Bess, she was completely overcome, and sank down into a chair, sobbing as though her very heart would break.

Poor girl! her thoughts were travelling back to the past.

She remembered each occasion when her friends happened to possess any of the thief-taker's ill-gotten wealth.

Above all, she remembered that morning when the first dissident words which had ever passed between herself and Jack Sheppard had been uttered—every incident connected with that parting came freshly upon her mind, and it was not strange that she should give way to her grief as she did.

Certainly, it would almost seem as though Wild's gold had some sort of a spell upon it, for whenever they had it in their possession, as she had said, some deep misfortune came upon them.

But in the present instance, when they were menaced by so horrible a danger, it was clearly to Wild's gold that the cause was to be traced.

That, and that alone, by exciting the cupidity of the man who occupied the hut, had brought the banditti down upon them.

Ned Cantle hardly knew how to console Edgworth Bess, and so he turned away and left her to herself, which

was, perhaps, the most prudent course of action he could have adopted.

Let him have tried as he would, his efforts would not have been attended with the slightest amount of success.

Instead of wasting his time, he made his way towards the door of the hut, in the hope of being able to hear something that would enable him to form an idea of what they were about.

But ere he could reach it, he heard some one knock loudly upon it, and then a voice said:

"Open—open! Zounds! is the door to be closed against the owner of the place? Open—open, I say!"

Ned recognised the voice, but he made no attempt to open the door.

It was the old man who spoke, the individual to whom was most clearly to be attributed the present disagreeable aspect of affairs.

No doubt the banditti thought that by adopting this scheme they should be able to gain an entrance to the cottage without any difficulty, and then the inmates of it would be completely at their mercy.

But now that his suspicions were so fully roused as they were, it was not likely that Ned would suffer himself to be deceived by so shallow a device.

The old man knocked again.

Ned still took no notice.

After this a silence followed.

No doubt the banditti were holding a consultation.

Edgworth Bess had heard the knocking at the door, and the sound had caused her to look up, and almost to forget her grief, for she was a prey to the liveliest terror.

Ned Cantle was cool and collected, as indeed he always was when the hour of danger was at hand.

He had satisfied himself that all his weapons were in good order, and he knew he could do no more towards barricading the door than he had done already, and so he awaited the attack that would, he felt convinced, ere long be made.

"They must be a set of shrinking, cowardly wretches," he said, "or they would not linger as they do! What have they got to linger for?—why don't they begin at once?"

Ned Cantle was impatient for the worst to come, and yet somehow, as he stood there in suspense, a strange fluttering feeling came over his heart, such as he had never before felt in the whole course of his existence.

What it meant he could not tell.

It was not fear, he was quite sure of that.

Did it portend something?

His position was a perilous one, for how was he to cope with such a superior force?

It seemed nothing but madness to resist.

But he was buoyed up by the hope that ere that night had passed away, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard would make their appearance; and, indeed, had it not been for the probability of their arrival in time to rescue, he might not have made any resistance.

As the reader knows full well, his hope was destined to be destroyed.

It was impossible for either Blueskin or Jack Sheppard to succour him in any way.

CHAPTER CXXCLXIII.

NED CANTLE IS SHOT, AND EDGWORTH BESS IS MADE A PRISONER BY THE GERMAN BANDITTI.

"THEY are suspicious—it is easy enough to see that!" said some one, in a growling voice. "They are suspicious, and there's no knowing now how much trouble we shall have!"

These words were spoken by the captain of the forest banditti, and were addressed to the cottager after his unsuccessful attempt to gain an entrance.

He was a singular-looking individual.

A striped handkerchief was bound in a very peculiar manner over his brows and head, and tied in a large knot behind.

Over his shoulder he wore a belt, to which a ponderous sword was attached, while round his waist was another belt, in which were stuck two of the largest and clumsiest-looking pistols that had ever been manufactured.

The lower part of his countenance was covered with shaggy hair, and though his attire was rather shabby

and very much the worse for wear, yet he had altogether a very ferocious and sinister look.

His face was bronzed, and bore the marks of many a serious wound.

The men under his control were a lot of bloodthirsty-looking villains, and were clad in every possible variety of costume.

It was clear that the discovery that the inmates of the cottage we fully upon their guard was a disagreeable one for them to make.

It would have suited them much better if they could have gained a stealthy admission to the hut, and taken their victims completely at unawares.

But now there was no hope of that, for, obtuse as the mental faculties of the German banditti might be, yet they could not but feel certain that Ned Cantle suspected something wrong was going on.

"It is no fault of mine!" said the woodman, in rather a sally tone. "When I left, all seemed right enough. I can't imagine what can have happened to raise their suspicions!"

"But they are raised, are they not?" said the chief.

"It isn't my fault!"

"Did I say it was?"

The woodman was silent, and the bandit chief stroked his beard and looked doubly ferocious.

"Never mind!" he muttered; "we will soon put an end to this job! We shall have a little trouble, I daresay, but, after all, what does it matter? We are more than a match for one man and a girl!"

Having come to this valorous conclusion, the bandit chief ordered an attack to be made upon the hut.

The men set about obeying his orders with alacrity, but most likely their boldness proceeded from the fact that they knew they had only one man to contend against.

They numbered altogether, including the woodman and the chief, about a dozen men, and it did not seem as though the enterprise before them would present many difficulties to being carried out.

The men were anxious, too, for the woodman had given them to understand that Ned Cantle carried a large sum with him.

It was an opportunity such as the banditti had not had for a long time past.

Several of them went to the back of the hut, and returned with a large piece of wood, which was evidently the trunk of some young tree.

This they intended to use as a battering-ram.

Considering the stoutness of this piece of timber and the number of men who carried it in connection with the frailness of the door which was to be destroyed, they seemed to have every chance of success.

Raising it in their arms in the required position, they made their way towards the door.

Arriving opposite to it, they, at a sign from their chief, ran forward with full force.

The blow was a severe one, but, owing to the admirable manner in which Ned Cantle had contrived to barricade the door, it only shook a little in its frame.

Ned heard these men coming, but he was not able to see what they were about.

As soon as the door received that tremendous blow, however, he raised both his pistols, and fired them in rapid succession.

The bullets passed clean through the door, and did fearful execution among the banditti who carried the trunk of the tree, two of whom fell to the earth lifeless.

This infuriated the chieftain to no slight extent.

Scarcely had the echoes of Ned Cantle's pistols died away than he drew the two formidable weapons we have mentioned from his belt, and fired through the door.

Ned had expected some such reply as this, and he had taken good care to remove himself out of danger.

The bullets from the bandit chieftain's pistols buried themselves harmlessly in the opposite wall of the hut.

Once more the bandits raised the trunk of the tree, having first removed the dead bodies of their comrades from their path.

They rushed forward with greater impetuosity than before.

But the door withstood this second blow, although it shook terribly.

The chief occupied himself in loading his pistols ready for future use.

Some startling German oaths came rattling from his lips when he saw that the second attempt was unsuccessful.

Ned Cantle fired again, but this time his shots were ineffective.

The chief returned them, and then said:

"Now, my lads, don't hold back—don't hold back! Forward! Down with the cottage!—level it with the earth!"

But his brave companions still persisted in holding back, and one of them ventured to mutter:

"They are fiends inside! It is not a man! Two of our comrades have fallen already, and who can tell who may be the next?"

Bang! came another shot through the door, for Ned had heard the bandits talking, and had fired in the direction of the sound.

Another fell to the earth.

This made things look rather serious, and the chief again poured out a string of oaths.

"Let us burn them out!" said the man who had before spoken—"let us roast them out of it, and see how they will like that! Roast them out!"

"Yes—yes!" said all, with one consent—"roast them out!"

The chief stroked his beard grimly.

The means proposed were the best he could think of, for by adopting them he should be able to effect his purpose with a greater amount of certainty, and with less danger to life and limb.

"Yes—that's it!" he cried. "We'll roast them! When they feel the fire, they will come out fast enough, I'll warrant you!"

This was quite enough for the men.

They dispersed themselves hurriedly, and quickly collected a large quantity of faggots that would burn with great fierceness when once ignited.

Ned Cantle heard them at work outside and fired through the door in regular succession.

But the banditti were careful enough to keep out of the way of the shots.

As soon as a sufficiently large quantity of wood had been heaped up outside the door, it was set light to.

It blazed up instantly.

The first intimation Ned received of what the banditti were about was the smoke which quickly began to roll into the cottage.

He knew then in an instant what had been done.

Soon he began to feel the heat of the burning wood, and the door began to be consumed.

The hut, however, was chiefly composed of wood, and owing to the direction of the wind, the flames spread, and with much greater rapidity than the banditti had expected.

In less than five minutes the whole of the building was one mass of flame.

Edgworth Bess screamed with terror, as she looked about her and saw how she was menaced with a frightful death.

The banditti had scarcely intended in the first instance to burn the hut to the ground, but now the flames had made such progress, all hope of saving the building was at an end.

Ned Cantle preserved his coolness in a most admirable manner.

The door fell in with a tremendous crash, and when it did so, he caught sight of the swartly forms and faces of the banditti.

In an instant he levelled his pistols and fired.

Great confusion was the result, and then another pistol was fired by the captain of the gang.

It was a chance aim, but it struck Ned Cantle in the throat.

A piercing shriek burst from the lips of Edgworth Bess, when she saw her only defender fall.

She sprang towards him in an instant, and raised his head.

The blood poured from the wound in his throat in immense quantities.

The flames roared, the wood crackled, and the banditti shouted.

But Edgworth Bess heeded neither the one nor the other, the whole of her attention was absorbed by Ned Cantle's desperate condition.

The gallant fellow strove hard to speak.

But his voice failed him.

He could not articulate a word.

No words of ours can do anything like justice to Edgworth Bess's despair.

But before another moment had elapsed Ned Cantle's head fell back.

He no longer had the power to hold it up.

Edgworth Bess was frantic.

In accents of the wildest despair and grief, she called upon him to look up and speak to her.

But her appeals were altogether in vain.

The interior of the cottage was rendered by the flames as light as noonday, and the poor girl could see everything with the greatest distinctness.

She noted the changing appearance of Ned Cantle's countenance, and she feared that what she beheld foretold the rapid approach of death.

She heard the banditti shouting without, but she paid not the least attention to their cries.

Her only friend—the only person who had either the power or the will to defend her—was dying, and dying for her sake!

Hotter and hotter—stifling and more stifling grew the air within the hut.

Higher and higher mounted the flames—fiercely and more fiercely they burned.

The interior of the hut was like a furnace.

The poor girl felt the hot air blistering her cheeks, she felt that her lips were parched, that her tongue was cleaving to the roof of her mouth.

But all she felt concerned about was that the form of Ned Cantle was rapidly stiffening into death.

His eyes were beginning to assume a glassy look—they had already lost all power of expression.

She was sure that he was dying—that he was almost dead; at any rate, he was insensible to what was going on around him.

What was to become of her?

She would either perish in those leaping, fiery flames, or she would fall unprotected and unresistingly into the hands of the marauders who had been the cause of all this havoc.

A mist came before her eyes.

The form of Ned Cantle seemed to be sinking down—down so deep, and yet it remained constantly and clearly in sight.

The poor girl's senses were leaving her.

Dimly, very dimly, she fancied she heard the roar of voices, and the rush of footsteps.

Then she felt herself raised in the air—as it seemed to her, by some supernatural agency.

Afterwards she felt herself borne swiftly along.

Then she felt herself scorched by an intense heat.

This was so real—so much more vivid than the rest, that she was restored to consciousness.

She gave one hasty glance around.

That glance told her that she had been by some means or other carried out of the burning hut.

The fresh, cool night air blew gratefully upon her blistered cheeks, and she revived still more.

By whom had she been rescued?

Some one was carrying her—she knew not whom.

But by an effort she opened her eyes and looked up, and as she did so, a wild scream burst from her lips, and she lapsed into a state of utter unconsciousness.

The hideous face of the bandit chief was within a few inches of her own.

CHAPTER CCCCLXIV.

GIVES SOME INFORMATION CONCERNING THE PROCEEDINGS OF WILD JUNIOR.

NEVER had the good old city of London been in such a state of commotion as it was during the week which succeeded the execution of Jack Sheppard.

And truly, the events which had occurred were of a character well calculated to raise the popular excitement to its highest pitch.

In the first place there was the execution of Jack Sheppard himself.

That alone was quite enough to cause an uproar, considering the many escapes he had made and the daring feats he had performed.

But, then, in addition, there were the extraordinary

incidents which had occurred at the foot of Tyburn Tree.

They were of an unparalleled character.

The story of how the sheriff had been imposed upon by an oddly-dressed little man was spread abroad of course with many exaggerations.

In those days the means for the rapid transmission of correct intelligence did not exist.

Most reports were propagated by word of mouth only, and, as everyone knows, a story never loses anything by telling.

The wretched apologies for newspapers which were then published—resembling the broadsides of a later date more than ought else—could not be depended upon for accurate information.

It was sure to be some garbled account that they contained, for journalism was then in its infancy.

Some flaring accounts were given, we can assure the reader.

The story about the little man with the odd-looking hat, who obtained possession of the dead body of Jack Sheppard and carried it off, was so strange a one that it could not fail to awake the keenest interest in every breast.

The mystery of the paper the sheriff had received, and from which all traces of writing had disappeared, was elucidated by coming to the conclusion that the devil was at the bottom of the whole transaction.

Many were indeed firmly of opinion that the little old man was no other than the evil one in disguise, who had come to carry off the body of his victim, so impatient was he to obtain possession of him.

Monstrous as this story was, it found many believers, and would have found still more, had not the rector of St. Martin's Church communicated the intelligence which he possessed.

That at once put an end to the idea that there was anything supernatural in the matter.

He communicated to the authorities the particulars of his singular interview with the little old man, and it was soon found that the description he gave of this character corresponded in all material particulars to that given by Sheriff Knobbles.

This established the fact that some such personage existed.

From what the rector stated, it seemed this singular being was some friend of Jack's, or of Jack's relations rather, and had adopted this scheme to obtain possession of the body.

There were many who were under the impression that Jack was not properly dead and buried, but now their suspicions were allayed, for the rector had stated that application had been made to him for permission to bury the body in St. Martin's Churchyard.

He also stated just what our old friend the German chemist wished him to state—namely, that the felon's relatives, now that they had got the body, were quite at a loss to know what to do with it.

Confidentially he informed the authorities that he had gone up to his room after refusing the request that had been made to him, and upon looking out of window he had seen some dark figures digging in the churchyard.

This seemed to set the whole matter at rest.

It was at once and very naturally concluded that Jack Sheppard had been buried in St. Martin's Churchyard; and the authorities, feeling that they had had bother and trouble enough with him already, thought that they could not do better than to allow him to remain there in peace.

In all probability this case of Jack Sheppard's would have been more looked into, had it not happened at the particular time it did.

But public attention was just then divided, and well it might be.

It caused a shock of astonishment to a great many persons when they found that Jonathan Wild, the celebrated thief-taker, was being sought after by the police-officers.

At first it was disbelieved that a warrant had been issued for his apprehension, but it was soon found that it was true enough, and that Jonathan Wild was a fugitive, compelled to fly for his life.

Fortune had changed with him indeed.

From being the pursuer he had become the pursued.

The account of the thief-taker's perilous and wonderful adventures in the ruins of his own house was devour d

with the utmost avidity, and everybody looked out anxiously for fresh tidings.

It was this which had the effect of distracting the attention of the people at large, and which prevented them from dwelling upon the details of Jack Sheppard's execution.

We can safely say that upon no person in London was such an effect produced as there was upon Mr. Noakes, the Governor of Newgate, when he learned that a warrant was in force against Wild.

He trembled, and broke out all over in a cold perspiration.

His conscience accused him, and he quaked with fear, lest he should be the next.

He had been mixed up in a great many of Wild's proceedings, and he felt that the disclosure of his complicity in them would cost him his situation, if not his life.

Indeed, so greatly alarmed was he that he felt strongly tempted to resign his situation, and leave the country while he was able to do so.

But the governorship of Newgate was such a comfortable post that he felt he should not like to give it up without more pressure was applied, and so he resolved to stay and face the matter out, for he thought he was perhaps after all frightening himself with a shadow.

He had confidence in Wild's resources, and doubted not that he would eventually get the better of his foes.

So after several hours' reflection, Mr. Noakes got himself into a more comfortable state of mind.

But can the reader imagine the effect which the intelligence of his father's danger would have upon Wild junior?

It will be remembered that this worthy son of a worthy parent had been seriously injured in his attempt to detain Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, and in making his escape from the burning house.

For some time it was doubtful whether he would recover; but Wild junior was destined to die a different death, and so he got better.

When he heard about his father he jumped upright in bed with astonishment.

He never said a word, but, after glaring wildly about for a moment or so, fell back.

He had not swooned.

As soon as he was alone he muttered:

"D—n me, if I didn't think the guv'nor would get in for it some day or other! I always thought it! He is such a d—d fool! What shall I do? His game's up, I feel assured of that! It's all over with him! He's going down—he's sinking, and if I don't look d—d sharp after myself I shall sink with him! That will never do, though! Let me think. How can I turn this to my advantage?"

George Wild set his brain to work.

He had the inventive faculty largely developed, and it was not long before he made up his mind what to do.

"Curse these wounds!" he said. "I am afraid they will interfere with me greatly. Never mind, they might be worse! I really think I am well enough. I will try it, anyhow. If I am not quick, I shall lose the chance!"

Wild junior at once set about getting out of bed and attiring himself.

This he found to be no easy task, but he accomplished it nevertheless.

He was very weak, and his wounds and burns pained him excessively.

He felt, however, that it was necessary for him to make an effort, or else he would be involved in the destruction that had descended upon his parent.

Wild junior had decided what to do.

It gave Mr. Noakes a bit of a turn when he saw him coming downstairs, but when Wild junior announced his intention of leaving the house, he was exceedingly well pleased.

He was glad of the prospect of getting rid of him.

Before going, however, Wild junior went into the governor's private office.

He took up a pen and dipped it in the ink.

Then, producing a pocket-book, he rummaged among its contents until he found a small piece of folded paper.

He chuckled as he unfolded it and smoothed it out upon the desk.

"Ha, ha! I thought it would come to this some day or other! Oh, I'm a clever chap—very clever! I am

always on the look-out for a rainy day! Now, if I had not taken the trouble to obtain this slip of paper, I should have been done for. As it is, my fortune's made. I shall go abroad and live like a gentleman!"

Wild junior dipped his pen in the ink again.

The piece of paper which he had taken from his pocket-book was a blank check.

How he had obtained it none knew but himself.

"I wonder what would be a safe amount?" he muttered. "I must be careful! If I ask for too much I shall get into trouble—perhaps be found out! But then it won't do to ask for too little!"

Wild junior hesitated, and dipped his pen into the ink again.

"I'll try twenty-five," he muttered. "Yes, I'll try twenty-five. I should think there would be that much, and a very nice sum indeed. Yes, it shall be twenty-five!"

He filled up the check as follows:—

"Pay G. Jidlow (my son) twenty-five thousand pounds.

"NATHAN JIDLOW."

"Nathan Jidlow!" said Wild junior, as he put a bit of a flourish under the signature—"Nathan Jidlow! What a rum name it does look to be sure! Whoever would think that Jonathan Wild could be spelled out of Nathan Jidlow by simply shifting the letters? Ah! the guv'nor's clever in his way—oh, yes, decidedly clever—but he's a d—d fool by the side of me!"

With this very diffident remark, George Wild carefully blotted the check.

He then held it up and examined it carefully.

"All right!" he said, after a pause. "All right! There's no mistake about that! It could not look more genuine! Ah! what a good thing it was now that I should fill up my spare time by practising to write like the guv'nor—it's come in useful! How clever I must have been, too, to find out what bank he put his money into, and that the account was opened in the name of Nathan Jidlow, and not Jonathan Wild! Ah! that was a glorious discovery, and when I made it I felt I could not rest until I had got a blank check. I knew it must come in useful some day or other, and the day has come!"

Satisfied that all was quite right, Wild junior put the check into his pocket-book again and prepared to start.

"Twenty-five thousand pounds!" he muttered, as he went along the street in the direction of the bank. "A swinging sum that, and no gammon! Now, I must be careful in the extreme not to excite suspicion!"

George Wild was quite right.

Jonathan had taken the precaution to provide against a rainy day, by depositing in a bank a very large sum of money.

It was done in the name of Nathan Jidlow—a name formed, it will be found, by the transposition of the letters in his own name.

This was an additional security.

He fancied he had kept this a secret from everybody, but, as we have seen, his son somehow or other managed to find it out.

He did not know how much there was in the bank to Jonathan Wild's credit, but he believed it was something over twenty-five thousand pounds.

This was a handsome sum, and he would be satisfied if he could obtain possession of it.

His father might then—to use George's own words—"take his luck."

There was one precaution which Wild had taken that militated against him, and turned in his son's favour.

The money deposited he had made up his mind not to touch until compelled by adverse circumstances to do so.

He was afraid he might find it impossible to go to the bank himself, and so certain did he feel about keeping the whole affair a profound secret, that he left instructions that when a check was presented the cash was to be given to the bearer without hesitation or delay.

By adopting this plan Wild thought he was making himself quite secure, for as he would never apply for the money except upon an emergency, it might have been awkward if the bankers had refused to hand over the money to anyone but the depositor.

And so we see Wild suffered for his own cleverness.

Wild junior was not acquainted with this interesting

fact, and he entered the bank with considerable trepidation.

With an assumption of great ease and confidence, he deliberately took out his pocket-book and handed the check to the clerk.

He was somewhat alarmed when he saw the clerk, after glancing at the check, carry it into a private office that was divided from the bank by a half-glass partition.

Wild junior fixed his eyes apprehensively upon the door through which the clerk had passed.

After the lapse of about a minute, which seemed an age to George, an elderly gentleman with a bald head emerged, and came towards that portion of the counter at which he was standing.

"You say you are Mr. Jidlow's son?" said the elderly gentleman.

"Yes, sir," returned George, calmly.

"All right! How will you take it—gold or notes?"

"Notes."

"Very good. Please to write your name on the back of the check, and then all will be right."

George Wild was so excited that he could scarcely hold a pen.

But, mustering up his courage, he wrote "George Jidlow" on the back of the check, and ten minutes afterwards left the bank with a roll of notes in his pocket, amounting to the sum of twenty-five thousand pounds!

CHAPTER CCCCLXV.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD START OFF IN QUEST OF EDGWORTH BESS.

HAVING glanced in succession at the various characters in this narrative, it now becomes our duty to revert to the proceedings of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

Alas! a sad discovery awaited them at that ruined hut on the borders of the forest!

The reader will remember that, under the guidance of the deformed son of the Widow Graacht, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard had travelled from Amsterdam, and when we saw them last they had arrived at a spot from which a view of the forest could be obtained.

Towards this they now proceeded at a quickened pace.

Upon closer approach, however, they perceived a cloud of smoke rising, apparently, from the ground.

Jack Sheppard was the first to perceive it, for all the way he was on the look-out to catch sight of the cottage containing Edgworth Bess.

He remembered their last parting, and reflected that, since then, they had been allowed no opportunity of having an explanation with each other.

Now that the moment was, as he believed, at hand, he trembled violently, and wondered how she would receive him.

With these thoughts passing through his mind, he kept a sharp look-out before him, and caught sight of the wreaths of smoke.

"Look, Blueskin!" he said. "What is that yonder?"

Blueskin looked, but he could give his companion no information, and yet, as he gazed, he felt his heart sink within him.

He turned round towards their elfish-looking guide.

But he shook his head, and this was the only reply they could elicit.

Whether he meant that he did not understand the question put to him, or whether he did not know what the smoke meant, was rather hard to say.

Both Blueskin and Jack, without knowing exactly why, were much depressed in spirits.

Nevertheless, they advanced even more quickly than before, and seemed altogether unconscious of fatigue.

When within a short distance of the wood, the elf-like boy uttered a strange cry, and rushed forward.

Our friends followed him.

They more than suspected something was amiss.

The boy bounded on before them at a speed of which they would have believed him incapable.

In spite of all their efforts they could not overtake him, nor would he attend to any of their demands to pause.

When he stopped, it was near the spot from which the smoke ascended.

He glared around him in evident dismay, and then he cried, in his peculiar guttural voice:

"Here was the cottage——"

"Here?" thundered Jack.

"Yes."

"Then, where is it now?"

The boy shook his head.

Jack Sheppard clasped his hands over his eyes.

"Again disappointed!" he murmured. "Shall I ever see her again?"

Blueskin turned towards the guide.

"Tell me again!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure this is the place where the cottage stood?"

"Yes, yes—quite sure!"

"What can have happened? What can have reduced it to ashes? Can you tell us?"

The boy shook his head.

Jack Sheppard gazed sadly upon the smouldering ruins that alone served to mark the spot where the cottage had stood.

What could have happened to Edgworth Bess now?"

He never suspected the true state of affairs, nor anything half so terrible.

Not so much as a wall was left to show that the ruins were those of a human habitation.

"The conflagration has been recent," said Blueskin.

"This fire, probably, has not been burning many hours."

"But where is Edgworth Bess?"

"There I am puzzled."

"She is lost!"

"Nay, do not give way either to despair or grief! You must not forget that she was under the immediate protection of Ned Cantle, in whom I have every confidence."

"But the fire?"

"May be the result of an accident."

Jack shook his head.

Somehow, although he wished to do so, he could not bring himself to believe that this was the true cause.

"If so," Blueskin continued, "Ned would remove her to some place of safety."

"But he would be here to tell us where they had gone."

"Perhaps he has not had time."

"My heart is heavy, Blueskin. I am afraid there is bad news in store for us."

"I fear so too."

"How are we to find out what has occurred? Tell me what is the best thing we can do! I had looked forward to this moment for so long! I had counted so much upon this meeting—that—that——"

"You feel yourself incapable of anything like clear thought."

"I do—I do!"

"And I don't wonder at it!"

"But you, Blueskin—you will try and think?"

"I will!"

Just as Blueskin spoke, the boy, who had been searching about, uttered a cry which had the effect of immediately attracting our friends' attention.

"Here—here!" he cried, in a hoarse voice.

Blueskin and Jack hastened towards him.

He was pointing down at some object which was half buried by the debris of the fire.

It looked like a human form.

Our friends at once set about the task of removing the rubbish; and, when they had done so, they found that their suspicions were well founded.

It was a human form.

Badly burned and scorched, though, it was; and it had almost lost all signs of humanity.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Blueskin, suddenly—"it is—and yet, it cannot be—yes—yes, it is Ned Cantle!"

Blueskin was right.

It was the body of Ned Cantle they had discovered.

Jack Sheppard bent forward, and a groan came from his lips.

"What are we to think of this?" he said.

"I am perfectly bewildered! I know not what to think!"

As he spoke, Blueskin stooped down in order to make a closer examination of Ned Cantle's body.

The result of this was that he saw the ghastly-looking wound which the pistol-bullet had inflicted in Ned's neck.

"There has been foul play here!" he said, as he perceived it. "But to whom to attribute it I know not!"

"Jonathan Wild! It is his work!"

"I can scarcely think that," said Blueskin, doubtfully.

"Oh yes, it is that villain's work! He has spies everywhere! He must have seen her! He has slain Ned Cantle, the poor girl is once more in his power, and all that we have done has been done in vain!"

Jack Sheppard's grief was dreadful to witness.

Blueskin could not help thinking that the thief-taker was at the bottom of this outrage, simply because he could not think of anyone else who would have the least motive to be guilty of it.

And yet, if he believed this, he felt that he should be compelled to give Jonathan Wild credit for more cleverness than he believed him to possess.

Could he but have fixed the deed upon anyone else, Blueskin would have dismissed from his mind all idea that Jonathan Wild had anything to do with it.

But he could not think of anyone whose purpose it could serve to slay Ned Cantle, carry off Edgworth Bess, and burn down the hut in which she had taken refuge.

"His pockets have been turned inside out!" he said at length, addressing his companion.

But Jack paid no attention to his words.

He was wholly absorbed by his deep grief, and was past heeding any trivial circumstances.

In his own mind he felt convinced that Edgworth Bess was once more in Jonathan Wild's power, and such being the case, his position was much worse than it was before. He would not be able to return to London now without running the greatest risk.

But the thought which gave him the greatest anguish was that Jonathan Wild would inform Edgworth Bess that he (Jack) had been strangled at Tyburn.

He would give the world to keep that knowledge from her, for if she was to know it, he felt that he would rather the information should come from the lips of anyone than from those of his enemy the thief-taker.

That would be horrible.

The appearance of the place was what might be expected from Jonathan Wild. Indeed, everything seemed to point to the fact that he, and he only, had been guilty of the deed.

Where was Edgworth Bess now?

Perhaps, Jack thought, on her way to England, in the safe custody either of the thief-taker himself or some of his myrmidons.

While Jack Sheppard was suffering himself to be the prey of these agonising feelings, Blueskin was bending over the body of Ned Cantle.

He deeply regretted his untimely fate, and although he had known him but for a short time, yet Ned had shown himself to be a stanch, sincere friend.

Blueskin was already deeply indebted to him, and had hoped that they should be companions together in those bright days which he hoped and anticipated were not far off.

But that hope was defeated.

Ned Cantle was a corpse.

Beyond question, he had received his death-wound in defending poor Edgworth Bess from her enemies.

Not until he had fallen would the persecuted girl be in the hands of her foes.

Blueskin put his hand upon the body, and found it was quite warm.

There was nothing surprising in this, for the ashes and rubbish with which he had been partially covered, would have more than sufficed to keep up the temperature of his body.

As a kind of forlorn hope, however, Blueskin placed his hand over his friend's breast, and as he did so he fancied he could detect a faint fluttering movement.

Directly he was sensible of it, he called out:

"Jack—Jack! He lives—he lives!"

"Who?" asked Sheppard, absently.

"Why, Ned Cantle, to be sure!"

"Does he?"

"I hope and believe so. If he does, we shall be able to learn what has happened, and to what extent our suspicions are justified."

Hearing these words, Jack came closer to the prostrate body.

"Water—water!" cried Blueskin. "Fetch some water! If we sprinkle some of that upon him, and pour a little of this brandy down his throat, he will probably be restored to consciousness."

The deformed boy, understanding that water was required, led the way to a well at the back of where the hut had stood, and from which the inhabitants procured their supply of this necessary fluid.

Jack brought some in a pail.

A portion was cast upon Ned Cantle's face, and the strong shudder which ran through his frame proved clearly enough that life was not yet extinct.

Blueskin had provided himself with some brandy, and he cautiously poured a little down Ned Cantle's throat.

It was swallowed, though with great difficulty.

Then Blueskin had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes.

He shuddered again.

Blueskin bent over him.

"Do you know me?" he said.

Ned nodded.

"Too late—too late!" he murmured faintly.

"I know that, but speak—tell us—where is Edgworth Bess?"

"Alas—alas!"

"Where is she?"

"Gone—carried off!"

Jack groaned.

This he imagined was confirmation of his fears.

"Where—by whom?" asked Blueskin. "How came you shot? Who burnt the cottage down?"

Ned Cantle made several efforts to speak.

But he could not.

A gasping noise came from his throat.

He gazed into Blueskin's eyes with a peculiar meaning. Our friend understood he wished to be raised up.

He lifted his head.

Then, after another effort, Ned spoke.

"Ger—Ger-man banditti!" he said, gasping at every syllable. "Edgworth Bess—carried off—into—forest—there, there!"

CHAPTER CCCCXLVI.

JONATHAN WILD RUNS SOME AWFUL RISKS, AND HAS A PECULIAR ADVENTURE.

It is high time that we took a peep at the proceedings of Jonathan Wild, who was last left in such a truly fearful position.

From the top of the wall Wild looked down into the yard many feet below him, and felt how pleased he should be if he could only reach it.

There was a house beyond the yard, and if he could but enter that and leave it unperceived, he would succeed in destroying all clue.

After that, he told himself, he should be able to rest.

Oh, how pleasantly that simple little word sounded in the ears of the thief-taker!

What a pleasure it would be if he could only lie down and repose his weary limbs!

He felt spent with the exertions he had already made, and was quite certain that he could not continue them.

The injuries he had sustained in falling from the top of the arch into the street were truly fearful, and no one save the possessor of that iron frame could have put up with them as he did.

Still he suffered excruciating pain, and every time he drew his breath fresh agony was inflicted.

Although no bones were broken, he was terribly bruised and shaken.

Not a single limb in his body had escaped.

Strong as his inclination was to descend, Wild looked doubtfully when he saw how far the yard was below him.

After his last experience, he was not exactly in the humour to risk another fall.

And yet he had no other choice.

He must either descend or remain where he was and fall into the hands of his foes.

He could not tell how soon they would be upon his track.

He shuddered.

"It is a frightful depth!" he muttered, "and yet—"

curses on them—I must descend! Let me see if there is anything I can grasp by which I can assist myself!"

The thief-taker crawled further along the wall.

Coming presently to an angle of it, he looked down.

A cry of joy almost escaped his lips when he caught sight of a water-butt.

This was more than he had hoped for.

Without another moment's delay, he lowered himself down, and found that his arms were long enough to enable his feet to rest on the edge of the butt.

Having gained this position, his further progress was easy enough, and in less than a moment he was standing in the yard, which was an enclosed place having an area of about half a dozen yards.

Now that he was down, Wild could see much better about him, and almost the first object upon which his eyes rested was a door.

He glided quickly towards it.

He placed his ear against the panel and listened.

But though he strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, he could not distinguish the faintest sound that would indicate the presence of anyone on the other side of it.

So far all was well, and with a trembling hand he raised the latch and pushed open the door to the extent of about a couple of inches.

Finding no notice was taken of this, he felt himself emboldened to enter.

He opened the door swiftly, entered, and closed it after him, almost without causing a sound.

The passage of the house into which he had intruded was profoundly dark.

No one seemed to be about, and the thief-taker, after a brief pause, ventured to advance.

A faint reflected light fell full upon the various objects before he had taken many steps, though from what source it proceeded he could not tell.

In all probability his eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness.

At length he perceived a fanlight over the front door, and through this came a feeble light.

This was a guide to him in his progress.

He rested his hand on the balusters of the staircase that led to the upper portion of the house.

But the silence of the grave continued to prevail.

So silent was it, that Wild felt it would be some relief to him to whisper his thoughts.

"I am lucky," he said—"very lucky! Surely all is well now! This place is silent. No one is about. The front door is only a few paces distant. I can hear nothing of my foes. Perhaps I have already eluded them. At all events, when I have passed out of that door into the street, all clue will be lost. Oh, curse these pains—they seem as though they would pull me to the ground!"

Jonathan was really suffering extreme pain, for the injuries he had received seemed to tell upon him more and more.

He clutched the bannisters tightly for support, and then feeling a little stronger, he strode towards the front door.

But even here, although he was, as he thought, so near to freedom, his caution did not desert him.

Upon placing his ear against the panel, he caught the sound of a footstep in the street.

Perhaps it was that of some chance pedestrian; but still, if it was, it would be good policy of him to wait until he had passed by, because if no one saw him leave that house, the better it would be for him, as his chief object was to leave no clue behind by which he could be followed.

He listened to the footstep.

"Curses on him!" exclaimed Wild, suddenly—"he is coming nearer. Yes, yes—he is coming nearer!"

There could be no doubt about it.

The footstep was certainly approaching, for as Wild listened, it sounded plainer and plainer in his ears.

"It is some one coming to this house!" said the thief-taker, in accents of alarm. "Can it be possible that anything so unlucky is about to happen? No, no! And yet, yes—he comes!"

Wild could no longer cheat himself into the belief that the footstep he heard was not rapidly approaching the house.

It was a man's step.

He could tell that by the confident, decided manner in which the foot was placed upon the ground.

He heard the man ascend the steps, and pause just outside the door.

Wild felt himself become bathed in perspiration.

Was he after all about to be discovered?

The person outside did not knock.

After a little while, Jonathan heard a key thrust rather impatiently into the keyhole.

"He is coming in—now what shall I do?" asked the thief-taker.

While he asked himself the question, he recovered his composure, and decided upon the course of action he would pursue.

Like a shadow he stole along the hall until he came to the foot of a flight of stairs.

Up these he went backwards, one at a time.

The thief-taker thought that in all probability the new comer would enter one of the rooms on the ground floor before he ascended the stairs.

If so, all would be well.

He had only to remain where he was for a few minutes, and then when silence reigned again to descend, creep along the passage, open the door, and be off.

"The door is only on the latch, then!" murmured the thief-taker, as the new comer entered.

The man closed the door behind him with a bang.

The sound caused Wild to start violently.

But his heart sank when he heard him begin to bolt and otherwise secure the door.

This man was evidently the last one to come in, and he was making all secure before he retired to rest.

Wild mounted a step or two higher.

Having fastened the door, the man came blundering along the passage.

The thief-taker now began to wonder whether the man would enter one of the rooms on the ground floor as he fancied he would.

Suppose he ascended the stairs, how then?

Wild had not thought of that, and he fairly held his breath with suspense.

Almost instinctively, as it seemed, the thief-taker, as the man approached the bottom of the staircase, went up higher and higher.

In another moment his worst fears were confirmed, and he cursed himself for having adopted the plan he had.

Now that it was too late, he saw clearly enough that he had made a mistake.

He ought to have entered one of the rooms on the ground floor.

Or even if he had stood behind the door, with his back pressed closely against the wall, he would have escaped detection.

If he had done this, how easy it would have been for him to have slipped out!

It was no good, however, to vex himself with thinking about that.

All his attention was required in taking measures to elude the observation of this man.

As we have said, the further he advanced along the passage, the higher Wild went up the stairs.

Whatever lingering doubts he might have had concerning the man's destination were now dispelled.

He began to ascend the staircase.

The most horrible imprecations rose to the thief-taker's lips, but he did not dare to utter them.

Oh, how delighted he would have been if he could have in some way compassed this man's destruction!

He felt almost like some wild animal thirsting for blood.

He was obliged to conquer the inclination, because he could not think of any means by which he could slay this man without running the risk of creating an alarm.

Up the stairs he went—not backwards now as he had done before, but forwards, so as to make the best of his way with the smallest possible amount of noise.

He had got the start, and maintained it easily.

Jonathan Wild thought he could not do better than continue to mount the stairs, allowing the man to follow him, and not pause until the man had entered one of the rooms.

The reason Wild did this was because he feared to open one of the doors, lest he should find the room occupied by some one.



[JONATHAN WILD IS MENACED WITH A FRESH DANGER.]

An immediate discovery would be the result.

Accordingly Wild felt himself driven higher and higher up the stairs.

The man did not pause on any of the landings, but continued to make his ascent at one regular speed, as though he knew he had a certain height to go, and that it was best done deliberately.

Oh, the state of mind in which the thief-taker was at this moment!

Just when he had felt himself on the very verge of completing his escape from the officers.

Just when he was congratulating himself that all was well—that he had thrown his pursuers off the track, and that he should be able to obtain that rest of which he felt so badly in want, the entrance of this man had spoiled all.

If he had been just a little bit earlier, or just a little bit later, all would have been right enough.

Jonathan could not help making these reflections, and yet they aggravated him almost beyond endurance.

No. 98.—BLUESKIN.

But all was to no purpose.

Up the stairs the man came, and Wild was compelled to ascend before him.

The attic region was now very close at hand.

Things would have to come to a crisis soon, if a change was not made.

Wild began to grow desperate.

Every moment that was thus wasted was of the utmost consequence to him.

The police officers would extend their researches, and he might be tracked to the house in which he now was before he could leave it.

If cursing could have killed anyone, the man who was mounting on the stairs would have been a dead man long ago.

But curses were impotent.

Only one more flight of stairs remained, and up these Wild went.

These stairs only led to the garrets.

It was just possible that the man might pause on the landing below.

Jonathan was only able to retain this hope for about a minute.

In the same dogged, deliberate manner as before, the man continued his ascent, so now it was quite clear the topmost story of the house was his destination.

Wild could scarcely have believed that it was possible for him to be so trapped.

At last he found he could go no higher.

He must either stand and face the matter out, or take refuge in one of the attics.

The latter was the course Wild resolved upon.

He felt that it was folly for him to hesitate about which door he should open.

It was a perfect matter of chance, and he might just as well take one as the other.

Stretching out his hand, he felt for the latch of the door nearest to him, and raising it, stepped into the ~~chamber~~ beyond.

A faint cry of alarm and astonishment saluted his ears as soon as he closed the door behind him.

Jonathan had not expected to find the attic tenanted, and when he found it was, the discovery gave him a bit of a shock.

Before he could do more than just notice that a woman was sitting down by the fire engaged in sewing, the door was opened, and the man who had caused Wild all this difficulty by following him up the stairs entered.

"Hullo!" he said roughly. "What's the meaning of this? Who the devil are you?"

The last part of the speech was addressed to Wild.

The woman uttered a faint scream, and started to her feet.

Nothing would have given the thief-taker so much joy as to have slaughtered these two persons on the spot.

But it would not do just then to give way too much to his feelings.

He must dissemble.

Ever fertile in invention, and ever ready to see the best way out of a difficulty, the thief-taker decided instantly what he should say and how he should act.

The man who had entered had seized him rather roughly by the collar of his coat, as he made the inquiry we have recorded.

But Jonathan made no attempt to shake it off.

In quite a calm voice he said:

"If you won't excite yourself, I will tell you how you can earn a large sum of money."

CHAPTER CCCCLXVII.

FOLLOWS THE FALLEN FORTUNES OF JONATHAN WILD.

THE contrast between these two men was really quite remarkable.

The man who had just entered was in a state of furious excitement.

Jonathan Wild was perfectly calm.

He did not move a muscle while he uttered the words with which the last chapter concluded.

It was only an assumption of calmness, however—nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to have strangled the man upon the spot.

But it was necessary to dissemble.

He felt that upon this new comer depended his life and liberty. If he could win him over to his interests, well and good; but if he failed, and the man raised an alarm, his fate would be sealed, for the officers would be quickly upon him.

After Jonathan had spoken, the man stood perfectly still, glaring at him as though he did not comprehend what had been said.

Perceiving this, Jonathan repeated his words:

"You can earn a large sum of money in a very little while," he said, "if you will be silent and obey my instructions."

"What do you want me to do?"

As he spoke, the man released the hold which he had taken upon the collar of Wild's coat.

The thief-taker immediately put his hand into his pocket and drew out a handful of gold.

Pressing it into the man's hand eagerly and quickly, he continued in the same calm even tone:

"Take that as an earnest—as a small portion of the amount you will earn."

The man looked surprised, as well he might, for he could not conceive what service he could render to anyone that would be worth even as much money as he had already received.

The woman, too, whose countenance at first bore an expression of alarm, came a step nearer, and gazed upon what was going forward in speechless amazement.

"Now," said Wild, "what I want you to do is to hide me somewhere, and if anyone comes to inquire whether you have seen a person answering to my description, you must answer No!"

The man whistled.

"Oh!" he said, "I see it all now plain enough—the grabs are after you."

Wild nodded.

"It is so," he said; "but if you feel inclined, you can assist me to escape, and put a good sum into your pocket at the same time."

"Well, I don't mind if I do," said the man; "but first of all, I should like to have a look at your face; I fancy I know your voice, but I cannot recollect who you are."

"Never mind the light," said Wild, more hastily than he had yet spoken. "There is no time to lose. First of all show me a hiding-place; if you don't, you will lose the chance of earning the money I have promised."

A miserable little oil lamp was burning on the chimney-piece.

The wick wanted trimming badly, and it scarcely served to light the wall close to which it stood.

While Wild was speaking, the man strode hastily across the room and took it up.

Trimming the wick with his fingers, he hastened back to the spot upon which Wild stood.

He held the lamp aloft, so that its principal rays fell upon the countenance of the thief-taker.

"Jonathan Wild!" exclaimed the man, in the utmost astonishment. "I thought I knew your voice. You don't mean to say the grabs are after you?"

Jonathan Wild had the greatest difficulty in subduing his passion. He was ready to bite his tongue off, so angry was he, to think he should have told the man what he had.

But it was in vain to regret; the words he had spoken could not be recalled.

"Come, come," he said, "are you willing to assist me? Yes or no? Delay will be fatal to me—every moment I expect to hear the officers upon the stairs."

"And a good job too," said the man. "Here, take your money—I would not aid you to escape for a thousand times as much as you possess. Do you remember George Wood?"

"Never mind George Wood," said Wild. "Think again; you will find that it will answer your purpose best to accept my offer."

"George Wood was my wife's brother," said the man, fiercely; "you did not know that, Jonathan Wild. You know well you gave false evidence against him, and had him executed at Tyburn last year."

Wild uttered a growl.

He felt strongly tempted to rush forward and with one blow put an end to this man's life; but his position was so truly desperate that he felt he dared not do so.

As he had said, he expected to hear every moment the officers on the stairs, and after the delay that had already taken place, he felt certain that his only chance of escape was to win this man over to his interests.

"This seemed no easy task, for immediately after having spoken, the man placed his back against the door, and taking a formidable clasp-knife from his pocket, said:

"Jonathan Wild, you will remain here until the officers arrive. The day of vengeance has come at last! I thought it would come, but I never dreamt that you, who had hunted so many poor fellows about, would come at last to be hunted yourself. You are my prisoner, Jonathan Wild, and if you escape, it will be after you have killed me!"

The thief-taker began to despair of effecting his purpose.

Bruised as he was from head to foot, and suffering the most acute bodily pain, as well as being thoroughly exhausted by the exertions he had been compelled to make to save himself from capture, he felt himself unequal to a struggle with this man, who was much superior to him in height and weight.

Convinced that all was lost without this man secreted

him somewhere, Jonathan Wild still continued his efforts.

Sharper means he felt convinced must be resorted to.

Before the man could guess what he was about to do, Wild sprang across the room to where the woman was standing.

She seemed ready to die with fright.

Wild seized her roughly by the hair, and thrusting the muzzle of a pistol with still greater roughness into her ear, he turned towards the man and said:

"If you come a step nearer to me I will fire. Now, then, will you aid me to escape? If you refuse, at that very moment your wife breathes her last!"

The man appeared quite overcome by this sudden proceeding; he had never expected it, and he stood with his back to the door, wondering what he should do.

That Jonathan Wild would not hesitate to keep his word he felt certain.

One glance at his bloodshot eyes and ferocious countenance was proof that he would be guilty of any atrocity. The man hesitated and lowered his knife.

As for the woman, she was so overcome by the horror of her position that she uttered a low cry and fainted.

Jonathan Wild still retained his savage grasp upon her hair, and by this means prevented her from falling to the ground.

"Now," said the thief-taker with a grin, "will you accept my terms? If you refuse, you will be the murderer of your wife, not me—recollect that."

What reply the man would have made is hard to say, but at that moment the trampling of many footsteps on the stairs and the hum of voices came plainly to the ears of the thief-taker.

"Curse you!" he cried savagely, "it is too late; but for your folly, I might have been saved. Take that for your pains!"

Uttering these words, Jonathan released his hold of the woman's hair, and rushing forward with the pistol still in his hand, he struck the man a violent blow on the head with it.

He dropped down as though shot, for he was not prepared for this sudden attack, his attention being directed to the noise upon the stairs.

There was a key sticking in the lock of the door, and perceiving this, Jonathan turned it quickly.

Having done this, he turned round and looked about him.

"What shall I do now?" he said, "Curse these fools, what trouble they might have saved! I am now no better off than I was at first—not so well, indeed, for I had more strength then than I have now."

The thief-taker was in truth terribly exhausted, and he dashed the perspiration impatiently from his brow.

"They are coming up!" he continued, "They will soon be here! How can I escape? There is no place where I can conceal myself; I should be discovered in a moment! How can I escape?"

He advanced to the centre of the room, and as he did so, perceived in one corner of the ceiling a trap-door, such as might be found in almost every house in London, to enable persons to escape in case of fire.

"That is the only way," said Wild, as he looked upon it. "The roofs! Yes, that is my only chance—I must once more take to the roofs!"

This trap-door was indeed the only outlet from the attic, and reluctant as he was, Jonathan was compelled to avail himself of it.

Just under this trap-door was a chest of drawers.

To mount upon these took Wild but a moment, and then he found that he could without difficulty reach the opening above.

He doubted, however, whether he should have strength enough to draw himself up.

While he hesitated, he heard the officers reach the attic door.

They tried to open it, but finding it was fast, knocked loudly and impatiently upon it.

That knocking seemed to infuse fresh strength into Wild's limbs.

By one sudden effort he drew himself up through the trap-door.

He was now in the open space between the tiles and the ceiling of the attic.

Replacing quickly the trap-door he had removed, Wild

stood upon it, and raising his arms, felt about him for the one above.

He had considerable difficulty in removing this second trap-door, which was fitted into the roof itself.

The bolts were so rusted into their sockets that he could scarcely withdraw them.

When at length he succeeded in doing this, he had to raise the trap-door itself, and this was almost more than his strength could accomplish, for on the outer side the trap-door was covered with lead.

A sudden crash, telling him that the attic door had been forced open, and the certainty that in another moment his foes would be upon him, endowed him with the strength of desperation.

With one sudden push, he removed the trap-door, and scrambled out upon the tiles.

Panting violently for breath, and with a deadly feeling of faintness about his heart, Jonathan Wild crawled slowly up the sloping roof.

Oh, how he cursed his evil fate!

His previous adventures on that eventful night had sickened him of the roofs.

In spite of all his efforts, he had never been able to reach the street unperceived.

Could he but do this, he felt that all would be well.

Reaching the highest portion of the roof, he slowly let himself down on the other side, but ere he had gone a yard he heard his foes emerging from the trap-door.

"It is all over!" he gasped; "it is all over! I may as well give in now, and let them take me. I cannot escape! In another moment they will be here!"

While muttering these words, he still continued his efforts to slip down the roof, and just as he had finished he caught sight of an attic window at no great distance. Despairing of making his escape, and yet anxious to prolong his capture as long as possible, Jonathan made a rush towards this attic window, and reached it before the officers gained the summit of the roof.

Fortunately a stack of chimneys concealed him from their view, and with nervous haste he set about unfastening this window.

To do this was an easy enough task, and had he been less agitated than he was at that moment he would have opened the window in half the time he did.

As it was, however, he managed to creep into the attic unperceived.

He would have given much if he could have recruited his strength by a few moments' rest, but that was impossible.

Hastening across the attic, which fortunately for him was vacant, he reached the door.

He passed through it, and closed it after him quickly.

He now found himself at the head of a flight of stairs, and leant over the bannisters and listened.

But all was perfectly silent.

The inhabitants had doubtless hours ago retired to rest.

With a silent and yet rapid tread Jonathan descended the stairs.

The next flight was carpeted, and so he was able to descend without fear of creating an alarm.

All now depended upon his speed.

He had succeeded much better than he could have anticipated, and could he but reach the front door and gain the street he would have one more chance for his life.

The house was as silent as though it was uninhabited, and in a very few minutes he reached the passage leading to the front door.

He paused upon the mat at the bottom of the stairs and listened.

To his joy, he was unable to hear the officers descending, which was what he fully expected.

Perhaps they had continued along the roof; perhaps even the attic window had escaped their notice.

Hope once more entered his heart.

Only one obstacle stood between himself and the open air.

That was the front door.

To undo the fastenings would be very easy, and then he would be at liberty.

CHAPTER CCCCLXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD SUCCEEDS IN ELUDING HIS FOES, AND RUSHES AGAIN INTO THE LION'S MOUTH.

HALF a dozen steps took Jonathan Wild to the front door.

One by one he removed the bolts and the massive chain that was placed across it.

All that remained was to turn the key in the lock, and this he did as slowly as possible.

Despite his care, however, a sharp snap followed, which sounded to him almost like the report of a pistol.

It was his fears that had exaggerated the sound.

Reassured by the silence which followed, he turned the handle and opened the door cautiously to the extent of about a couple of inches.

He peeped out.

The street was quite deserted.

He listened, but no footfall betokened the approach of any chance pedestrian.

Rendered bold not only by this but also by the silence which prevailed in the interior of the house, Jonathan Wild opened the door a little wider and glided out into the street.

But before he could look about him, or decide which direction he should take, a loud whistle sounded in his ears, and the next moment he felt himself seized by some one with an iron grasp.

With a cry of despair he wrenched his head round, and saw that it was a police officer who had seized him.

Another whistle sounded not far off, and then came a hasty rush of many footsteps.

"Give in, Wild!" said the officer who had captured him; "don't attempt to resist; you cannot possibly escape; give in quietly—you have caused us trouble enough already."

The thief-taker uttered a growl such as one might expect to come from the throat of some wild beast upon finding itself in the toils of the hunter.

But he did not take the officer's advice.

So far from it, he commenced a desperate struggle.

Seizing the officer by the throat with great suddenness, he threw him off his balance, and he fell heavily to the ground.

His head came into violent contact with the kerbstone, and then Wild felt the officer's grasp relax.

Without waiting for more, he scrambled to his feet and darted off just as a body of police officers came round the corner.

The loud shout which they gave at once let him know that he was seen.

Although so fearfully exhausted, Jonathan Wild would not succumb.

He felt that it was foolish of him to attempt to outrun the officers.

The chase could only terminate by his capture.

But, for all that, he bounded onward at a speed that was really surprising.

He turned swiftly round the first corner he came to, and then round the next.

For an instant his pursuers were out of sight, but this was no advantage to him, for he could see no place that would afford him shelter.

One thing greatly in his favour was, that he was intimately acquainted with every court and alley in that portion of London.

In former times, when he had been the pursuer, he had often known a fugitive double upon him and escape, and he hoped that he might be successful in doing so.

He would have been almost certain to succeed had he not been in such a dreadful state of weakness; but now he felt at every step as though he could not possibly take another.

He bounded on, turning and winding at every few yards, and yet pursuing one general direction.

Suddenly, as he turned a corner into a street he heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and looking up he saw a horseman approaching at a steady trot.

Jonathan uttered a cry of satisfaction.

Rushing forward, he seized the horse by the bridle and brought him to a standstill with so much suddenness that the rider, who was unprepared, was almost thrown out of the saddle.

Perceiving that he had lost his balance, Jonathan seized

the leg nearest him, and by a slight effort succeeded in hurling him to the ground.

The rider lay motionless in the road, but before Wild could mount the officers were in sight.

They guessed in a moment what he was about, and rushed forward with redoubled speed.

But they were too late to detain him.

Springing into the saddle, Jonathan turned the horse's head round and struck him fiercely with his heels in the flanks.

It was a high-spirited animal, and unused to such treatment.

It snorted and gave a sudden bound forward, but Wild was an accomplished horseman, and sat as firm as a rock.

By every means in his power he urged the horse onward, but there was no necessity for him to do so, for the creature galloped on at the top of its speed.

In a second, as it seemed, the officers were left behind, and then Jonathan directed his course eastward, but he would not permit the horse to abate its speed; he knew well enough that the officers would not be long in providing themselves with horses, and the pursuit would be begun again with fresh vigour.

The further he got off the better.

So exultant was he at this unexpected deliverance from a position of so much peril that he could not refrain from shouting aloud.

The frightful sounds which came from his throat terrified the horse exceedingly, and panting and trembling, it flew onwards at a speed that was absolutely terrific.

Wild forgot now all the perils and hardships he had undergone; he was only conscious of the delightful fact that he had escaped, and that every moment was taking him further and further out of the reach of his pursuers.

In a little while London was left behind and the open country gained.

From time to time the thief-taker turned his head and looked back, but upon no occasion did he see the least signs of his pursuers.

"Escaped!" he said to himself. "Yes, I have escaped! I am free now, and if I was only a little stronger—if I was not in such frightful pain—I would quickly take such steps as would make my capture impossible."

After galloping for nearly an hour without hearing or seeing anything of his foes, Wild paused.

He felt that for the time he was safe.

He had left no trail behind him by which he could be tracked, and he had reached a place which he fully believed would afford him safe shelter for a considerable length of time.

He had paused in Plaistow Marshes.

At the present day this place is rarely visited, and a hundred and fifty years ago more rarely still, and the extent of the marshes was three times greater than it is now.

The soft oozy ground was thickly overgrown with osiers and that species of vegetation which thrives in a swampy soil.

It was not a very pleasant place in which to take up his quarters, but Jonathan Wild did not mind that—he only bore in mind the fact that it was safe.

Dismounting, he led his horse to a place where the vegetation was thickest and rankest.

Here he paused, and having secured the horse, he took his knife from his pocket and cut down a large quantity of osiers.

These he placed upon the wet, soft ground, crossing them over and over until he had made quite a pile.

Upon the top of this he flung himself, and lay profoundly still.

Day was just beginning to dawn, but Jonathan had little fear of being disturbed.

Weeks and weeks might elapse before anyone visited that dismal spot, and he only intended to remain there for a few hours in order that he might obtain the rest of which he stood so much in need, and determine upon his future proceedings.

He would have given anything if he could have closed his eyes and then and there gone to sleep, but the horrible pain occasioned by the fall he had had made it impossible.

He tossed about and tried in vain to find a comfortable position.

Oh, the agony he suffered then! It was, however, but a foretaste of what was to come.

Could he but have seen into the future, he would have ceased all further efforts and put an end to his existence.

At last, about sunrise Jonathan sank off to sleep.

For several hours his slumber was profound; he was unconscious of everything.

His mind was rested before his body, and his brain began actively to work.

Dreams of the most fearful character occupied his mind.

The whole proceedings of the past night were in imagination begun again, and so vivid was the vision that Jonathan Wild felt all those terrible sensations to which he had formerly been a victim.

With a start and a scream he awoke.

For some moments he gazed about him in astonishment.

He could not recollect what had happened, nor imagine where he was.

Soon, however, all came back to him, and then a perfect storm of imprecations came from his lips.

He ceased when he became a little calmer.

He was surprised to find that night was so close at hand, and it was some time before he could bring himself to believe that he had slept a whole day.

He was afforded much pleasure by discovering that his pains were by no means so acute as they had been, though when he moved some of his limbs the agony was almost more than he could bear.

Still he was better, and that imparted a feeling of great satisfaction to him.

He laid down again upon the osiers and strove to think clearly over his position, and to decide what would be the best course for him to adopt.

"And this is the end of all," he murmured. "Foiled at the last moment—foiled when I had succeeded—when I had triumphed over every obstacle—when my future course was as clear before me as it was easy. There no longer existed any difficulty in the way of carrying out my plans—all had gone well; and then to be foiled in a manner I least expected!"

The thief-taker was silent for some minutes.

No doubt it was a bitter reflection for him to make.

The reader will remember how on his walk back from Tyburn he had felicitated himself upon the fruition of all his schemes, and then this sudden and unexpected reverse had come upon him.

"It was well," he said, "that I had the forethought to provide against such a contingency as the present. I must for ever abandon all thoughts of accomplishing the one grand scheme of my existence. I must give my whole attention to escaping from my enemies.

"I will leave England, but before I go it will be necessary for me to obtain possession of that wealth which I have so cleverly sequestered, and which will enable me to live in affluence in some foreign land.

"Yes; that will be the end of my career. I had hoped for a better termination, but it is not to be. I will be satisfied, for it might be worse."

From these words it will be seen that Jonathan was fast resigning himself to his fate. He was, in fact, making a virtue of necessity.

As he had truly said, it would require the whole of his thoughts and energies to escape from his foes.

The authorities had resolved to use every effort to capture him and bring him to justice, for it was felt that it would be monstrous for such crimes as Wild had committed to go unpunished.

Had Jonathan then and there set about leaving the country, there is very little doubt he would have been successful, but he felt that he could not go until he had obtained that sum of money which he had deposited in the bank in the name of Nathan Jidlow.

He fancied he would have but little difficulty in doing this.

Of course he would have to be very cautious.

His first step would be to return to London unperceived, and there disguise himself in such a manner as to escape detection.

Then, according to the arrangements which he had made at the time when he deposited the money, he would be able to go over in person, or he could obtain the money by sending a messenger with the check.

Which of the courses he adopted would depend on circumstances.

Jonathan made up his mind, however, that he would leave his present place of concealment, and make his way by a circuitous route to London, and when he arrived there he imagined it would be time enough for him to consider what to do next.

CHAPTER CCCCLXIX.

THE POLICE OFFICERS DRIVE JONATHAN WILD FROM HIS PLACE OF REFUGE.

HAVING come to this conclusion, Jonathan Wild rose to his feet.

He made his way to the stunted tree to which he had secured his horse, and having untied him, led him by the bridle through the marshes to the open ground.

The walk was not a long one, still it tried Wild's powers to the utmost.

He could scarcely believe that he was so weak, and when he reached firm ground he was so exhausted as to be unable to mount his steed.

The injuries he had received in his terrific fall from the top of the archway began to make themselves more severely felt than ever.

Some of his joints he could not move at all, and every time he drew a longer breath than usual, the agony was almost more than he could bear.

This showed that he had received internal as well as external injuries.

Clutching the saddle with both hands, he rested his head against it.

He was so utterly overpowered that he could not move. Had his enemies been at hand, his capture now would have been easy enough.

Jonathan remained for some time in this position.

By degrees the frightful feeling of lassitude which had come over him to some extent passed away.

At length, raising his head, he looked about him for some mound or slight elevation upon which he could stand, and by this means more readily mount his horse.

But as far as he could see the ground presented one uniform dead level.

Looking piercingly about him, he at length espied at no great distance the trunk of a tree lying in a horizontal position upon the ground.

Towards this he led his horse, and having brought him alongside of it, he after several efforts managed to seat himself in the saddle.

"Thank heaven," he murmured to himself, as he gathered the reins in his hand, "that is over! Now I am once more mounted I don't care, but I am weaker than ever I imagined myself to be. I fancy now I shall have to put off my journey to London until I am stronger and better; but I shall see—I shall see!"

Uttering these words, Jonathan urged his horse forward.

But he soon found the motion, easy as it was, caused great pain, so that before he had gone many yards he was compelled to reduce his horse's speed to a walk.

The feeling of exhaustion, which he hoped would pass away, rapidly increased, and several times he had a narrow escape from falling to the earth.

"I must halt somewhere," he said to himself. "I must look out for some lonely, unfrequented place, where I can stay with safety. It would be the height of folly for me to proceed to London while I am in this condition.

"In this part of the country, I shall surely find some inn, with little or no trade, where I can take up my quarters for a few days. I have money, and I shall be able to pay them liberally for their trouble. That must be it. I must be careful, though, where I stop."

Jonathan Wild felt better, and even stronger, after having determined to rest for a brief period.

Guiding his horse across a large meadow, he came at length to a little gate, which he opened and passed through.

This led him into a narrow winding lane, both sides of which were fringed by a low hedge.

At a slow walk, he continued along this lane for a considerable distance without seeing the least signs of a human habitation.

He came at length to a place where another lane intersected the one he was travelling, at right angles, and at

one of the corners formed by the junction of these roads stood a small old-fashioned-looking inn.

This was just the place Wild had desired to find.

The country around was flat, and as far as he could see there was not a single dwelling.

Coming closer, he saw that there was suspended in front of the inn a truss of straw, which signified that there was accommodation both for horse and rider.

Jonathan stopped before the front door, and he had scarcely done so when the landlord and a bandy-legged old man whom he took to be the ostler made their appearance.

In this out-of-the-way place, Wild had little fear of being known; still, as a precautionary measure, he disguised his voice when he spoke.

It was what would be considered a light night, but still the darkness was great enough to prevent anyone observing him closely.

The landlord and the ostler saw that there was a man on horseback, and that was about all they could make out.

"Can I put up here for a few days?" said Wild. "I have been thrown from my horse and bruised and shaken a bit. A day or two's rest will put me right, if I can have it."

Of course the landlord was willing and able to accommodate his customer.

He brightened up and looked quite brisk when he heard Wild speak, for trade was slack at the inn; being in such a lonely spot, it was very rarely that so good a customer stopped before the door.

"Help me to alight," said Wild, "for I feel so stiff, that I can hardly move a limb. Be careful," he added, "for I am badly bruised."

Not without some trouble he was lifted from his horse. The pain caused by this process was most excruciating, but Wild bore it like a martyr.

When he reached his feet, however, he could not suppress a loud and startling groan.

"Dear me!" said the landlord, "you must be very bad, sir—you have given me quite a turn. Hadn't I better send for a doctor?"

"No, no; a doctor would do me no good; rest is the only thing that I require!" said Wild, quickly.

"Very good, sir!" returned the landlord, "you know best of course. Lean upon my arm and I will lead you indoors. Jim, take the gentleman's horse to the stable."

The ostler obeyed, and Jonathan Wild, leaning heavily upon the landlord's arm, passed into the inn.

He was glad to seat himself in an arm chair.

"There!" he said, "let me be now a bit to recover myself."

"I will get your bed-room ready, sir," said the landlord. "Would you like anything before you retire to rest?"

Wild reflected.

He had no appetite, and still less inclination to eat, and yet he remembered that very many hours had elapsed since he had partaken of either food or drink, and he was well aware that without these natural wants were attended to, his weakness would increase rather than otherwise.

This decided him, and he ordered the landlord to attend in a supper.

Of this he partook heartily, and then, after having drank a quantity of brandy, that quite startled the landlord, he retired to rest.

Upon gaining the room, Wild bolted the door.

There was no lock upon it, and in order to make it more secure, he drew his sword and lodged it in a peculiar manner under one of the panels.

This done, he flung himself upon the bed dressed as he was, and in consequence of his deep potations and extreme fatigue was soon asleep.

In this inn Wild remained several days without the occurrence of any event of a particular or alarming character.

He rapidly grew stronger and better, thus proving that he was right when he said it was only rest that he required.

During his stay in this quiet place he had an excellent opportunity of reviewing his position, and calculating the chances which he had of ultimate escape.

It was, however, with a deep sigh that he admitted to himself that he must henceforth abandon those schemes for his aggrandisement which had of late occupied so much of his attention.

There was little to inspire him either with hope or confidence.

The only consolation he could find was in the thought that if he had failed in so many things, he had succeeded in wreaking his vengeance upon Jack Sheppard.

Jonathan took good care to keep himself out of sight.

There was only the landlord who saw him, and it was evident from his manner that he had not the slightest suspicion as to the identity of his customer.

It was on the evening of the fifth day when Wild—feeling stronger, in less pain, and in better spirits than he had been since his arrival—was sitting at the window of his room, which commanded a view over the country in the direction of London.

While looking out listlessly he chanced to perceive in the distance some huge, dim, moving object.

A glance was sufficient to show him that this was a troop of mounted police.

Upon making the discovery he started to his feet, and opening the window, strained his eyes to the utmost, in order to watch the movements of those who his heart told him were his enemies.

It was beginning to grow dark, and objects in the distance looked dim and indistinct; still he saw, or fancied he saw that these horsemen were mounted police officers, and that they were approaching the inn.

As may be expected, this discovery filled him with the utmost alarm.

"What shall I do?" was the first question that presented itself to his mind. "Will it be better for me to remain where I am? The landlord has no suspicion, and I may be perfectly safe. If I leave the inn I shall most certainly be seen."

It was not for long, however, that he suffered himself to be puzzled. That fertility of invention for which he was so remarkable had not deserted him, and he quickly determined how he should act.

Putting on his hat, he opened the door of his room and descended the stairs.

In the passage he met the landlord, and in a voice that was perfectly calm, Wild said:

"I am just going to look at my horse. It is very likely that I shall leave to-morrow, for I feel myself almost well now."

"You will find him all right, sir," said the landlord.

"I have no doubt of that," replied Wild; "only, having nothing else to do, I thought I would go and look at him."

"Certainly, sir, you are quite welcome. Shall I go with you?"

"No; I can find my way myself readily enough," said Wild.

With these words on his lips he passed out of the back door of the inn, and crossed the yard.

The ostler was leaning against the stable door, smoking a pipe, and upon seeing Wild approach, he touched his hat and stood aside.

Wild stopped, and said with great abruptness:

"Do you want to earn a guinea?"

The question was one which probably had never been addressed to the ostler before, for he looked at Wild with great astonishment.

"Of course you want a guinea!" said Wild, without giving the ostler time to reply. "And I will tell you how to earn one in less than five minutes. First of all, put the saddle and bridle on my horse."

This was an order that the ostler fully understood, and he obeyed with alacrity.

"So far so good," said Wild. "And now the only thing you have to do, is to go to the front of the inn and look if you can see any mounted men approaching. Be quick and bring word back to me, and when you have done that you will have earned the guinea."

The ostler looked surprised, as well he might, but nevertheless he shuffled off across the yard to the front of the inn.

He was only absent for about a moment.

Wild determined to be prepared for the worst.

All his pistols he knew were carefully loaded, and in readiness for immediate use.

He led the horse to the door of the stable, and by the time he had done this the ostler returned.

"Well?" said Wild.

"There's some horsemen coming along the lane, for certain," replied the ostler.

"Are they far away?"

"They be just by Sykes's farm, sir."

"How far is that?" asked the thief-taker, impatiently.

"But little more than half a mile, sir."

"Are they so close?"

"They are a good deal closer by this time, sir; they were by Sykes's farm when I stood at the front."

"And they are coming towards the inn?"

"Yes."

"Here's your guinea, then—you have earned it! Now help me to mount."

The ostler obeyed.

"Is there any back way out of the yard?" was the thief-taker's next question.

"No, sir. There is but one way, and that is under the arch yonder."

The ostler pointed, as he spoke, to the archway that led from the yard to the front of the inn.

Wild uttered an oath.

Looking round him, however, he saw that the yard was only divided from a meadow by a wooden fence.

It was a good height, but Wild resolved to run the risk of leaping it.

It was better to do that than to attempt to pass under the archway, because if he did he would be seen by the officers the instant he emerged.

If he could only succeed in clearing this fence, he stood a chance of getting away unperceived—or, at any rate, he would have a good start of his pursuers.

The ostler shook his head when he saw Wild back his horse and then prepare to leap over the fence.

Evidently he believed that the thing was impossible.

But the horse was a good one, and full of spirit.

Wild struck him fiercely with his spurs, and with a snort of pain the noble creature flew forward, and, giving one tremendous bound, jumped clean over the fence.

Wild preserved his seat with great skill, although the horse descended with quite a sharp shock.

Just as the horse leaped, there was a loud shout which came from many throats, and then a party of police officers, some twenty in number, dashed under the arch.

They were just in time to see Wild disappear.

With cries of vexation, they turned their horses' heads round again, and started off in pursuit.

But by the time they gained the meadow, Wild was a long way off, and they could only just distinguish a dark, shadowy mass flitting rapidly over the open country.

CHAPTER CCCLXX.

JONATHAN WILD OUTRUNS THE OFFICERS, AND OBTAINS A CAPITAL DISGUISE.

WHEN the whole of the events connected with the attempt to capture Wild became known, a universal feeling of horror and detestation was excited in the breasts of everyone.

As for the police officers, they were in a state of the greatest exasperation.

The losses and injuries that Wild had caused were very great.

Several men were dead, and many others sorely wounded.

Never before had such a desperate resistance been made. But the authorities determined not to be discouraged, and to use every effort to bring the daring offender to justice.

We have already stated that Wild was the object of popular dislike, and these events which had just occurred increased the feeling tenfold.

Large rewards were offered by the Government for his apprehension, to which other sums were added by private individuals, among them Lord Ingestre, who had neither forgiven nor forgotten Wild's behaviour in connection with the diamond necklace.

The gentleman who Wild had so violently deprived of his horse and hurled into the roadway, was killed upon the spot, in consequence of his head having come into violent contact with a large stone.

When Wild galloped off in the manner already related, the officers soon lost all trace of him.

On the following morning, however, a large body of police officers assembled upon the spot where Wild had been last seen.

They then separated into troops and dispersed themselves

over the country, searching in every direction for the fugitive.

But though they made numberless inquiries, they failed to elicit any information, for it will be remembered that Wild neither saw nor spoke to anyone during his rapid flight.

It was one of these detachments that Wild saw approaching the inn.

The officer in command had no idea that Wild had taken up his quarters in that particular inn, but it was the only house for miles round, and he led his men towards it for the purpose of obtaining a brief rest, and also to elicit what information he could from the landlord.

Seeing the gateway which led from the front of the inn to the stables, the officers trotted under it without hesitation.

Just as they entered, however, they caught sight of Wild leaping over the fence, and so they uttered that loud cry which made the fugitive aware that he had been seen by his enemies.

When the police officers saw what a good start Wild had got they did not despair of capturing him.

All that was requisite for them to do was to keep him in sight.

This promised to be difficult, for Wild's figure became more and more indistinct each moment, although the officers urged their horses forward by whip and spur.

But the animals were tired.

They had travelled many miles without rest or food, and consequently were not equal to a long and rapid gallop.

Here Wild had the advantage, for his horse, which was one of great mettle, had had several days' entire rest and plenty of good corn, so that he flew onward over the level ground almost with the rapidity of a racehorse.

Wild chuckled with satisfaction when he saw how rapidly he was gaining on his foes.

He urged his horse onward by every means he could think of, for he knew that his safety depended upon his getting out of sight of the officers before they were joined by a fresh party.

The night was dark, for the sky was entirely covered by dark clouds, and the wind made that low, moaning sound which is so often heard before rain.

All this was in the thief-taker's favour, and hope took firm possession of his heart.

Presently he paused.

He was on a piece of slightly-elevated ground, and he looked back in the direction he had just come.

But his earnest gaze failed to detect the slightest signs of the officers.

"One more escape!" he said, as he urged his horse on again. "I have fairly distanced them. But I must be very cautious now! No doubt they are trying their utmost to effect my capture, but they will fail! I will follow out my original intention. I will make my way to London, disguise myself, obtain the large sum of money which I have deposited in the bank and then leave England for ever!"

Little did Wild think that he was making this frightfully perilous journey to London for nothing.

Little did he dream that his delectable son had been beforehand with him, and had drawn out to within a few pounds all the money which he had placed in the bank under the name of Nathan Jidlow.

Had anyone told him that this had been done, he would have refused to credit it, so firmly persuaded was he that no one but himself knew anything of the transaction.

And so Jonathan Wild ran into the lion's mouth.

By the loneliest road he could think of he made his way to London.

He took every precaution to avoid being seen.

It was close upon daylight when Jonathan stopped in a narrow street leading out of the Kent Road.

He had reached this point of his journey without seeing or hearing anything of the officers, and without, as he firmly believed, having attracted the notice of anyone.

No one was stirring in that little by-street at this early hour.

The house before which he halted was one that differed in no way from those adjoining it.

All the inmates had apparently retired to rest, for there was no light at any of the windows.

It was a small shop, but the shutters were all closed. Jonathan Wild, however, alighted from his horse, and pulled a bell, the handle of which was almost concealed in the door-post.

He rang it twice and then waited patiently.

After the lapse of a few minutes, a little wicket in the door itself was opened and a face appeared at the aperture.

"Let me in!" said Wild, as soon as this face appeared—"let me in, I say! You know better than to refuse!"

The man who had opened the wicket no sooner heard the thief-taker's voice than he uttered a groan.

"Be quick!" said Wild. "I cannot stay here all day. Let me in at once, or it will be the worse for you!"

With another groan the man withdrew his face from the wicket, and set to work removing the fastenings of the door.

Then he opened it, and wild pushed his way in, dragging his horse in with him.

"Now shut the door, Jack Powell!" he cried, "and be quick about it!"

It was clear that Jonathan possessed some sort of power over this man, for he obeyed him, though as it seemed reluctantly.

The door was closed and fastened, and then Wild said:

"You know me, Jack?"

"I do, Mr. Wild," was the reply.

The words were followed by another groan.

"You must serve me!" said the thief-taker. "I am in need of such service as you can render. If you aid me, and you can do so easily, I will agree to hold you free with respect to the past; but if you refuse, you know that I can, by uttering half a dozen words, have you arrested, condemned, and executed at Tyburn!"

The man trembled, and his teeth chattered as he said:

"Don't talk about that, Mr. Wild—please don't!"

"I don't intend to do so, only I thought it would be necessary to remind you of it. I am in a little difficulty now—to you it may seem a serious one, but I shall get through it all right. You must not fall into the mistake of supposing that my power is at an end; I am still free to make an accusation. You know it can be done anonymously, and I am the only person who can do it. You are also aware that if the accusation is made, the proofs will be found, and a host of witnesses will come forward immediately."

"I know all about that, Mr. Wild!" said the man, in more abject tones than before. "You need not remind me of anything; and I only wish that I could forget all about it, even for half an hour; but I cannot—the recollection is always before me, even when I am asleep."

"That is no fault of mine!" growled Wild, "and I cannot help it. The only service I could render you would be to put you out of your misery, and I suppose you don't want me to do that?"

"No, no!"

"Wretched as you are, or as you would make believe you are, you would prefer to live a little longer?"

"Ye-yes, Mr. Wild!"

"Do as I require, and you will have nothing to fear from me."

"I will, Mr. Wild. I shall be very glad to assist you in any way I can."

"Bah!—stuff! You know better!"

Jack Powell made a gesture of dissent.

"If I didn't possess the knowledge I do of that very ugly transaction of yours," continued the thief-taker, "I know the sort of service you would render me—you would call in the officers, and try your best to get a share of the reward, which you know is offered for my apprehension."

Jack Powell looked down on the floor, and was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"If you won't believe in my willingness to do you a good turn, Mr. Wild, just say what it is that I am to do, and I will do it."

"That is all right, Jack. I hope I shall be able to trust you—you will find it worth your while, and so long as you don't betray me, my lips will be sealed as regards that little affair at —"

"You need not say anything more about it, Mr. Wild," said Jack Powell, in an imploring voice. "Let us change the subject."

"With all my heart!"

"What do you want, Mr. Wild?"

"I want a disguise—a good one. I know you can furnish me with it."

"I can, and will, Mr. Wild!"

"Set about finding me one at once, then, for the sooner I am off the better."

"Come this way, Mr. Wild, and you shall have what you require. Perhaps you won't mind holding the light?" Wild took the candle which the other carried.

The shop occupied by Powell was one where second-hand clothing of all descriptions was sold, and many miscellaneous things besides.

In was hung round with garments of every conceivable description, and they were piled up on shelves or stored under the counter.

"What disguise would you like, Mr. Wild?" said Powell.

"I could fit you out in any way you pleased, from a cressing-sweeper to an officer in a cavalry uniform."

Wild paused reflectively for a moment, and then said:

"I should not look well in a soldier's uniform, I fancy. Could you disguise me as a Quaker?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild. I have some garments that will fit you exactly. They are a little the worse for wear—not much; though I suppose that don't matter?"

"Not a bit—not a bit! Let me see them."

Powell rummaged among a heap of clothes such as were worn by the Quakers at the beginning of the last century.

Wild nodded, and said:

"That will do!"

"Will you put them on now, Mr. Wild?"

"Of course!"

"Go into this back room, then, and while you are changing your clothes, I will look about for a hat."

"Very good!"

Powell led the thief-taker into a room at the back of the shop, and having lighted the lamp that stood on the table, he returned to the shop.

Wild was not long in changing his apparel, and as soon as he had finished he walked into the shop.

The change in his appearance was very great, for he was an adept at disguising himself.

When he put on the hat, which was excessively low in the crown and disproportionately wide in the brim, the transformation was wonderful.

Wild looked like a respectable middle-aged Quaker in rather poor circumstances.

"Shall I do, Powell?" he said.

"You are changed wonderfully, Mr. Wild!"

"I am glad of it. But fetch me some water and a cork."

Powell did so, and then Wild washed his face thoroughly.

"You had better have a fresh wig, Mr. Wild."

"Have you got one?"

"Oh yes!"

Wild said nothing, but immediately pulled his own wig off and threw it down.

Powell handed the thief-taker a box containing wigs of all kinds.

Wild tried several, and at length decided upon one which met with his entire approval.

In colour it was brown, and the hair was very long and very straight.

He put this on, and then, taking the cork, burnt it a little in the flame of the candle, and by its aid slightly darkened his eyebrows.

Then he put on the hat.

The alteration in his appearance was even more startling than before.

His hideous and remarkable physiognomy he could not change, but by tying a scarf round his neck and by pulling the broad-brimmed hat over his eyes he was able to conceal a great portion of it.

He was now in readiness to start; but first of all he felt it would be necessary to say a few menacing words to Jack Powell, although that individual had manifested the utmost willingness to assist him.

Wild grasped him rather roughly by the arm.

"I am going to London, Jack—to London! Mark that!"

"Yes."

"I am going dressed as you see me now. I shall act my part well—never fear! And now I warn you, if I am recognised I shall know that it is you who has put the officers on the scent; and whether they capture me or



[EDGORTH BESS IS DRAGGED THROUGH THE FOREST BY THE BANDIT.]

not, I will forward a full disclosure of what took place on the twenty-second of May, three years ago, to the proper quarter, and then you know what will follow."

"Don't threaten me, Mr. Wild—don't threaten me! I know you can put my head in the halter any moment you like, and so it's to my interest not to betray you."

"Of course it is; and I am pleased to see that you look upon things in such a sensible way. But the reward is great, Jack, and I know you are not very well off. Now, don't be tempted by it, however large the reward may be. You may get it, of course, but it will cost you dear!"

"I should have to pay for it with my life, Mr. Wild, and so I should not think of it!"

"Very good! That is all I desire; and to show you that I can be grateful for a service rendered—although I could compel you to do what I liked for nothing—I will pay you for what you have done to-night. Take that!"

Wild gave him a large sum of money.

No. 99.—BLUESKIN.

It was received with many protestations of gratitude, to which, however, he paid little attention.

"Listen to me," he said, interrupting him. "Open the door, go outside, and look well up and down the street. If there is anyone about, come back and tell me; if not, remain where you are, and I will follow."

Powell nodded, and passed out into the street.

Wild's horse had stood quietly enough in the shop, though at times it looked around as if half frightened, but it was tired, and glad to rest.

Jonathan waited a moment, and then led his horse out.

Powell stood near the door.

"Is there anyone about?" said the thief-taker.

"No one, Mr. Wild."

"Good-bye, then, I am off; and beware! If you attempt to betray me you know the consequences!"

The thief-taker did not wait to hear what Powell said in reply, but, touching his horse slightly with the spur, rode off at a sharp trot.

"Fortune favours me!" he muttered, "and all promises go well. I never expected such a capital disguise as this. I know I can play my part to admiration. No one saw me arrive; no one has seen me depart except Powell, and I have little fear that he will betray me."

CHAPTER CCCCXXI.

JONATHAN WILD DISCOVERS HIS LOSS, AND IS CAPTURED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS IN THE INN YARD.

At a steady rate, as befitted the character he had assumed, Jonathan Wild made his way towards London.

It was morning, but as yet few people were astir.

He had plenty of time before him, for at least five hours would have to elapse before he could gain admittance to the bank.

How he was going to occupy those five hours he scarcely knew.

He thought once of putting up his horse at some roadside inn and proceeding to London on foot, but then he was fearful lest he should be recognised, in which case his horse would be of great service to him.

He drew in the rein, and allowed his horse to go only at a quiet walk; still, if he went no faster, it would not take him more than an hour to reach the city.

On his way the thief-taker had plenty of occupation for his thoughts.

He calculated over and over again the chances he had of ultimate escape.

He was satisfied that his prospect was good.

As he drew nearer to the metropolis the streets became more filled with people, and many cast curious glances at the mounted Quaker; but beyond this no notice was taken of him.

At length, at about six o'clock in the morning, he reached Fenchurch Street.

It was in this street that the bank was situated in which he had deposited the money.

How to pass the four hours which intervened between then and the time for opening the bank he scarcely knew, but at last he determined to put up his horse in some contiguous thoroughfare, and take a private room at the same inn.

This was certainly the best thing he could have decided upon doing.

In the next street there was a public-house, with livery stables adjoining, and, after giving one glance at the whole of the premises, Jonathan resolved to stay there.

He gave his horse into the charge of the ostler, entered the inn, and ordered a private room.

The principals of the establishment were not astir, and Jonathan was waited on by a girl who seemed as though she had been up all night.

He was ushered into a room on the upper floor, where he sat down with a bottle of brandy before him.

In this manner he managed to pass the time pleasantly and comfortably enough, though it hung very heavily upon his hands for all that.

The brandy he drank produced no other effect than a kind of nervous excitement, and he strode rapidly up and down the room, for he found it impossible to sit still.

"I will go to the bank myself," he murmured for about the hundredth time. "Yes, I will go myself—I have made up my mind to that. There may be some risk, and yet I think not much. At any rate, I can't think the risk greater than it would be to send some one else for the money. At the bank, no one suspects my identity. My disguise has answered my purpose so far, and while they have no suspicion as to who I am, I think I need not feel afraid."

This, then, was the course adopted by Jonathan Wild. As soon as ever ten o'clock came, he sallied forth, leaving word that he should return in a few minutes, and giving instructions for his horse to be got ready for his use.

During the last half-hour of his stay, he had occupied himself in making various little alterations and improvements in his disguise.

It was now much better and effective than it had been before.

No one would have thought of looking for Jonathan Wild in such a garb as that, in a character so very dissimilar to his own.

With his hands clasped behind his back, and with his

head bent forward in a meditative way, his eyes constantly fixed upon the ground, and with a slight shuffle in his walk, the thief-taker left the inn, and turned the corner into Fenchurch Street.

He paused when he reached the bank, and took a piece of paper from his pocket, which he affected to consult.

To have seen him, one would have thought he was some countryman, in doubt whether he was at his proper destination.

Wild's motive for doing this was to have the opportunity of glancing around him, to observe whether any of his foes were lurking about.

But he saw nothing to excite his apprehension, and, with a feeling of greater confidence about his heart than he had yet had, he ascended the steps and entered the bank.

Going up to the counter, Wild took a blank check from his pocket-book, and asked the clerk for a pen.

One was given to him, and in a great, sprawling, shaky handwriting, he filled up the check for twenty-four thousand pounds.

He knew he had more in the bank than that, but he did not wish to draw all out, as that might have attracted suspicion.

It might be useful, too, he thought, to continue to have his account open there.

The balance left was not very great, and the amount for which he had filled up the check was as much as was necessary for his purpose.

With every confidence, Wild handed the check to the clerk, little suspecting what would be the result.

He watched the young man take the check to another portion of the bank—he saw him reach down a huge book and open it at a particular place; then the clerk started with surprise, looked at the check, then at the book again.

Wild was watching him with the utmost intentness—not the least movement that he made escaped his notice, and he wondered what was amiss.

His uneasiness increased when he saw the clerk go to another of his companions, show him the check, and then lead him to the book.

A whispered conference now ensued, and then one of them, taking up the book, followed the other into the private office.

Jonathan's alarm grew greater.

He dreaded something, and yet he knew not what.

His fears were awakened, and yet they took no tangible shape. He was strongly inclined to beat a precipitate retreat; but he conquered this inclination, and with his very lips white he glared at the half-glass door through which the two clerks had passed, and his suspense was awful.

It did not continue long, however.

Suddenly the door was opened and one of the clerks appeared.

He came to Wild and said:

"Be good enough to follow me into the private room—the manager wishes to speak with you."

Jonathan felt his heart torn cold within him, and his knees smote against each other, yet he could not refuse to do as he had been requested.

Filled with dread, fearing that something terrible was about to happen, he followed the young man into the private room.

The manager held the check in his hand, and, turning to the thief-taker, said:

"Did you present this check?"

"Yea, I did," said Wild, capitably imitating a Quaker's voice and manner.

"And are you Mr. Nathan Jidlow?"

"Yea, such is the name by which I am known."

"Well; it is very strange that you should present this check. No such sum as twenty-four thousand pounds remains to your credit in this bank, and you must have known it. What was your object in presenting this check?"

Wild glared at the manager with parted lips.

Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet he could not have been more astonished.

The expression of his face was frightful to behold, and the manager evidently thought so, for he pushed his chair closer to the wall.

"What?" screamed Wild, presently recovering his voice,

and altogether forgetting the character he had assumed. "What!—no such sum? Say that again—I don't understand you!"

Foam gathered on the thief-taker's lips, and his excitement was so terrible that those who witnessed it feared that he was about to fall into a fit.

The manager was so terrified that he could not command his voice.

"Speak!" yelled Wild, in a voice that echoed through the whole building, and clutching the edge of the table nervously. "Speak!—say that again!"

"I said," stammered the manager, "that there was no such sum as twenty-four thousand pounds to your credit in this bank, and added that you must have been aware of it."

Wild gasped for breath, and then sank into a chair.

All his strength seemed to have deserted him, and he trembled like a leaf.

At a sign from the manager, one of the clerks left the room, and almost immediately afterwards returned, bringing with him an oblong slip of paper.

It was the check which Wild junior had presented.

"Give Mr. Jidlow that," said the manager, addressing the clerk.

The check was placed in Wild's hands, but for some time he was too stupefied and overcome to look at it.

When he did, the whole truth burst upon him at once.

A volley of the most awful imprecations that were ever uttered by a human being came from his lips, and terminated in a yell of such a frightful character that the manager tried hard to force his chair through the wall.

"And—and," gasped Wild, "this check was presented?"

"Certainly!"

"When?"

"You will see the date upon the check."

"And you cashed it?"

"Most certainly."

Wild broke out into another storm of curses.

"That check is a forgery, then?" said the manager.

"It is a base, villanous forgery!"

"I am sorry for that, Mr. Jidlow, but the fault is in a great measure your own."

"How so?—how so?"

"When you deposited this money, you made a stipulation that whenever a check was presented, even for the whole amount, it was to be cashed at once without hesitation. These were your terms, and we of course agreed to them."

Wild groaned.

"In the ordinary course of business, this would not have happened. Upon receiving a check for so large an amount, representing as it did, within a few pounds, the amount of your deposit, we should not have parted with the money until we had communicated with you and ascertained that it was correct."

Wild groaned again.

"I know—I know,—that is quite right; it is my fault."

"What do you wish done, Mr. Jidlow? I shall be nappy to assist you in any way that you may desire!"

"You can do nothing," said the thief-taker, "except let me go. It is no good for me to stay. Let me go!"

Trembling and shaking, and looking at least ten years older than when he entered the bank, Jonathan Wild rose to his feet, and passed out of the office into the street like a man in a dream.

Mechanically he directed his steps towards the public-house at which he had left his horse.

"Lost—lost!" he murmured. "May my bitterest curse fall upon the head of the villain who has robbed me of all, and in such a manner! Aliter all I had done for him, too, and his promises to be faithful! Idiot that I was! I believed him, and placed great confidence in him! And now this is the result! I might have known it—I might have known it! He has been a curse to me from the hour he was born! Those papers which so mysteriously disappeared, I felt sure he had purloined, but yet I could not fix the deed upon him. How he could have learned that I had money deposited in that bank and under that name, and how he could have arrived so nearly to the exact amount, is more than I can comprehend—it puzzles me completely!"

Never in all his life had Jonathan Wild been so downcast as he was at this moment.

This was the second instalment of his punishment—there were many more yet to come.

What he should do now, Wild knew not.

All the plans which he had laid were overturned—all his hopes of escape and the prospect of happiness in another land were destroyed.

By degrees his disappointment and grief abated, and another feeling took their place.

That was revenge.

"I will have vengeance upon him!" he muttered savagely. "I will have a full, deep, and deadly vengeance! He has forgotten that he is my son, and I will forget it! I will hunt him to the death! He shall not live to enjoy the money which he has so basely robbed me of! He shall die!"

Wild paused a moment, and then continued:

"I will follow out my original intention of leaving England with all speed, for doubtless he has already left the country. Then I will devote myself entirely to revenge, and I will not rest till I have satisfied it."

The prospect of having revenge upon his son seemed to console Wild greatly.

Just as he had reached this point in his reflections, he reached the inn.

He had almost forgotten that he had assumed the character of a Quaker, but luckily he remembered it.

He turned into the stable-yard, and, going up to the ostler, said:

"Friend, is my nag ready?"

"Here you are, sir! Jim, bring out the gentleman's horse!"

Wild turned towards the stable.

The door was opened, but instead of his horse being led forth, a body of police officers appeared, and they at once rushed towards him.

"Betrayed!" said Wild, and as he uttered the words, he turned round to fly.

But a cry of despair came quickly to his lips.

Another body of police officers formed a barrier across the entrance to the stable-yard.

He was trapped, and there was no hope of escape.

The police officers, who numbered twenty at the very least, quickly closed round him.

Wild made a desperate resistance, but it was a vain one.

It was impossible for him or anyone else to contend successfully against such a superior force.

In the twinkling of an eye he was disarmed, and held tightly by many hands.

Jonathan Wild was at last a prisoner.

CHAPTER CCCCXXII.

EDGORTH BESS MAKES A FRANTIC ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM THE BANDITTI.

LET us now return to poor Edgorth Bess, whose perilous situation demands the whole of our attention.

She was in the power of the banditti.

It was not long before the chief and his followers became aware that some injury must have been inflicted upon Ned Cantle, for the discharge of the pistols from within entirely ceased.

They set up a kind of a cheer when they found this to be the case.

"It is all right now, my lads!" said the bandit chief. "We shall have no further trouble. You must be quick, though, and fetch the bodies out of the hut, or they will be consumed—not that that matters, only they have the money about them."

The chief set the example of rushing forward and removing from before the half-burnt door the faggots that they had piled up against it.

When that was done, the lower portion of the door was red-hot.

One blow demolished it, and at length the way into the hut was clear before them.

It looked a perilous feat to venture into that blazing cottage, for the flames had taken firm hold of every part, and the roof seemed each instant as though it would fall in.

The belief that Ned Cantle had about him a large sum of money lent the banditti courage, and so, without pausing to reflect, they rushed in.

The smoke confused them very much, but almost immediately upon their entrance they discovered the two bodies near the door.

Ned Cantle was lying down at full length, and Edgworth Bess was leaning over him, frantically but vainly endeavouring to restore him to consciousness.

As soon as the bandit chief made this discovery, he stooped down and picked Edgworth Bess up in his arms with as much ease as though she had been a child.

Then, shouting to his men to drag the body of Ned Cantle out of the flames, the bandit chief rushed into the open air.

As we have previously said, Edgworth Bess almost, but not quite, lost her consciousness.

She knew she was being moved, though by what means she could not tell.

The flames spread themselves entirely before the door of the hut, and the chief had to force his way through what might be termed a wall of fire.

The intense scorching heat lasted but an instant, but it had the effect of restoring Edgworth Bess to her senses.

It was then that, feeling herself in the arms of some one, and being carried rapidly away, she by an effort turned her head, and, looking up, saw that it was the bandit chief who was conveying her in his arms.

Upon making this discovery, a loud shriek thrilled from her lips, and she fell into a state of utter insensibility.

The bandit chief placed her down upon the ground and returned to his men, who, according to his directions, had dragged the body of Ned Cantle out of the hut.

Already they were stooping over him and busily engaged in searching his pockets.

They were rewarded by finding a large sum in thalers, as well as pearls and other jewels, worth at least three times as much.

It was many a day since this banditti had had so good a booty, and their elation of spirits was consequently very great.

They forgot all about those of their unfortunate companions who had met with their deaths in this affair; or if they did remember them, they at the same time made the reflection that now they were gone there were fewer to divide the booty amongst, so that the share of each would be greater.

The chief was careful to take possession of the whole of the valuables, money included, having done which, he became anxious to retire.

The flames from the cottage would light up the country for miles round, and though no one dwelt near, yet the fire might be seen by some one who would hasten to the spot.

They wished to leave behind them no more traces of their presence than they could possibly help.

"Quick—quick!" said the chief. "We will retire—we have no more to do. Pick up the body of that fool, who has caused so much loss and trouble, and fling him back into the fire!"

This command was at once obeyed, and Ned Cantle, bleeding, warm, and scarcely dead, was picked up by three of the bandits, and hurled into the flames.

At that moment the roof fell, bringing several of the walls along with it.

The fall of this mass of rubbish had the effect of almost extinguishing the fire.

The flames no longer sprang upwards as they had done, but only flickered.

"Pick up your dead and wounded comrades," said the chief, "and carry them into the forest. We do not want to leave any clue that will cause us to be suspected of this deed."

This was done, and the chief then advanced to the spot where he had placed Edgworth Bess.

The poor girl was fast recovering her senses; and she looked about her, terrified and bewildered.

Roughly the bandit chief raised her to her feet, and grasping her by the arm, he said:

"Come, you must go with us!"

She shuddered, but made no reply.

Mechanically she suffered herself to be led forward.

In a desultory through the bandits and their chief plunged into the recesses of the forest, upon the borders of which the cottage had stood.

There seemed to be no path among the trees, and yet

they advanced with perfect confidence. Doubtless they were familiar with every tree and bush.

Edgworth Bess suffered herself to be led for a considerable distance before she fully realised the nature of her position.

Then she thought about Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, whose appearance she hourly expected.

What would they think when, upon arriving at the cottage, they found it a mass of burning ruins, and were unable to form an idea as to where she had gone?

Perhaps, she thought, they had already arrived, and if so, was it right of her to suffer herself to be led unresistingly wherever the banditti pleased?

As she mentally asked herself this question, she made a sudden effort to free herself from the grasp which the bandit chief kept upon her arm.

He was unprepared for such a movement, for the manner in which she had hitherto permitted him to lead her along had thrown him off his guard.

To her joy, then, Edgworth Bess found herself free.

Turning round, she bounded off with the speed of a hunted hare, and disappeared among the bushes before the bandit chief could recover from his astonishment.

"After her!" he cried. "Throw down your comrades, and follow her! If she escapes it will be all over with us—she will let out all that we have done."

So saying, the bandit chief commenced a rapid pursuit after the escaped prisoner.

He was assisted by his men, who spread themselves out into an irregular line, and kept steadily in the direction which Edgworth Bess had taken.

They made good speed, for they were accustomed to travel in the forest, and in a little while they had the satisfaction of hearing the rustling of the bushes and the crackling of the twigs before them, as they were displaced or trodden upon by the poor girl in her hasty flight.

This caused them to quicken their steps, and then emerging into a broad, open glade, they saw the fugitive before them at no great distance.

It was evident that her strength was failing her, for she did not run so swiftly as at first.

Still she flew onward in rapid, frenzied bounds.

The chase, however, was one that could not continue.

She could hear her pursuers close behind her—she did not attempt to turn her head and look back, but she uttered shriek after shriek, in the hope that these sounds of distress might reach some friendly ear, and bring some one to her assistance.

But, alas! they had no such result.

She could feel her strength rapidly leaving her, and at the same time she was aware that her pursuers were coming closer and closer behind her.

At last, with a moan of anguish, she sank upon the ground, and once more she became a prisoner of the banditti.

They seemed disposed to show her even less kindness and consideration than before.

They forced her to rise—though her strength would scarcely allow her to do so—and then she was seized by both arms by the bandit chief and one of his companions, and, in spite of her struggles and frantic screams for help, was dragged forcibly along.

After a time she became passive.

She found that her struggles availed her not, and that her screams brought her no assistance.

Completely exhausted, she suffered herself to be dragged along without a murmur.

She was overcome by the harrowing reflection that in all probability at that very moment Blueskin and Jack Sheppard had reached the cottage, and were full of despair at her disappearance.

The journey through the forest was a long one, and at length, being unable to proceed further, she sank upon the ground.

The bandit chief stooped down and picked her up, carrying her in his arms as before.

Ere she had gone many yards further, the poor girl lapsed into a state of perfect insensibility, from which she did not recover for several hours.

The banditti continued their course some distance further through the forest, until at length they paused before a huge, majestic-looking ruin, the outlines and extent of which could not be perfectly seen in the darkness.

This ruin, doubtless at some former time the residence

of a feudal German baron, was evidently the destination of the banditti.

Crossing the dilapidated court-yard, they passed under the low arched doorway leading into the donjon or keep.

At this point the chief separated from his followers.

Still carrying Edgworth Bess in his arms, he pushed open an inner door at the bottom of a flight of steps.

Up these he sped quickly, nor did he pause until he had reached the top.

Here he kicked open another door, which led into a small apartment situated just beneath the roof of the keep.

This chamber was furnished with just a few necessary articles of furniture, and that was all.

Depositing his fair prisoner upon a wretched pallet in one corner, the bandit chief quitted the apartment, leaving her to recover when and how she pleased.

On passing out he was careful to secure the door, and having done this he descended the stairs.

He made his way to a large apartment on the ground floor, in which his gang of desperadoes had assembled.

In former times, judging from its size and general appearance, this must have been the banquetting-hall of the castle.

Few traces of its former grandeur now remained, and the floor was littered with miscellaneous articles of every description.

The bandit chief was greeted by his men with a round of applause when he entered.

He smiled grimly, for he understood the rascals were anticipating the division of the large plunder they had so unexpectedly gained.

The chief set about this duty without delay, and when it was over, wines and spirits were produced from an inner chamber, and a regular carouse commenced.

The banditti who inhabited this old ruin had been the terror of the inhabitants of the surrounding district for years past.

They were strong in numbers, and always took such good precautions that up to the present moment they had set at defiance all attempts to discover their secret haunts.

Their depredations, however, were perpetual.

Travellers through that thinly-populated region were stopped and plundered of every article of value they possessed, and if they resisted their lives paid the forfeit.

Cottages were burned to the ground and the inhabitants brutally murdered if the banditti had the least suspicion that valuables were contained within.

Indeed, there was no enormity, however great, of which they had not at some time or other been guilty, and though many efforts had been made to capture them, all had failed.

Such, then, was the character of the villains into whose hands poor Edgworth Bess had fallen.

The object of the bandit chief in making her his prisoner seemed clear enough.

He saw that she was a native of a foreign land, and believed that if he took her prisoner, in all probability he should be able to exact a ransom from her friends.

CHAPTER CCCLXXIII.

EDGWORTH BESS BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH CRAZY CARL. How long she remained in that deathlike state of insensibility Edgworth Bess knew not.

When she recovered herself, the first sounds that struck upon her ears were those which came from the banquet-hall below, where the banditti were still carousing.

She listened to the sounds in the utmost terror, and for a long time could not imagine where she was.

The little chamber in which she had been confined was profoundly dark, so that she was unable to form the least idea as to the kind of place she was in.

By slow degrees, however, the recollection of all that had happened came back to her.

She remembered Ned Cantle's death, and how she herself had been carried off by the banditti.

The last point to which her memory took her was where she had sank on the ground.

She fancied she had been carried along for some distance, but after that, all was blank until she had awoke with those horrible sounds ringing in her ears.

Having understood all so far, it required no great mental effort to enable her to imagine the rest, and to

come to a tolerably correct conclusion regarding her position.

Clasping her hands over her face, she sobbed and cried bitterly; indeed, so violent was her grief, and so much had it exhausted her, that unconsciously she sank off into a deep slumber.

When she awoke again it was daylight, and so she was enabled to observe the various features of her prison.

There was very little to see, however.

The bare stone walls were black with age, and so was the ceiling above.

There was only one door leading out of this little chamber, and that was the one through which she had been brought.

At length summoning up sufficient courage to do so, she arose and went towards this door, but her heart sank when she saw how strong it seemed to be.

Despairingly she took hold of it, but, as she fully expected, found herself unable even to shake it in its frame.

Her sobs and tears broke forth again.

Feeling almost heartbroken, she crossed the room to the window.

This was a small opening in the thickness of the wall.

In width it was little more than a foot, and its height less than three.

From the exterior it must have looked like a small loophole, and this is the only name which it deserves.

Edgworth Bess was astonished when she beheld the thickness of the wall.

It was a yard at the very least.

This little loophole was strongly barred both on the outside and within, so that there was no hope of escape in that quarter.

Holding by these bars, and pressing her face as close to them as she could, Edgworth Bess looked out.

She could only obtain a view of a very limited extent.

Nothing met her earnest gaze but the tops of myriads of trees and the fair blue sky above them.

There was nothing to indicate the presence of any of her fellow-creatures.

The silence of the very grave was around her, for the banditti, having finished their carouse, were all engaged in sleeping off the effects of it.

The tops of the tallest trees were a long way below her, and by this means—and this alone—the poor girl became aware that the chamber in which she stood was an immense distance from the ground.

In the prospect from the window there was nothing to encourage her. Even if those iron bars had not been there, she could not have escaped through the loophole, for there was nothing in the little chamber by the aid of which she could have descended to the ground.

She looked once more at the door, but it seemed stronger than ever.

She sank down again upon the pallet from which she had risen, feeling more dispirited and downcast, now she had made an examination of her prison, than she had done before.

She wept long and silently, and in no direction could she turn to see the least glimmering of hope.

The prolonged absence of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard filled her mind with apprehension.

She dreaded that something terrible had happened to one or both of them.

She had great faith in their resources, but still she could not bring herself to believe that they would be able to track her through the forest to the place where she was confined; or, if they did, how could they cope with such a superior force as the banditti?

She was, too, at a loss to imagine for what purpose she had been made a prisoner, and the more she thought upon this subject the more perplexed did she become.

She came at last to the conclusion that the only chance she had of rejoining her friends was to find some means of escaping from the prison, and making all speed to the ruined cottage.

This, however, seemed impossible.

How could she escape from so secure a place of confinement?

She was a prisoner—a hopeless prisoner—and must resign herself to the course of events.

In this gloomy and despondent state she remained for some time.

At length she was aroused by hearing a faint sound.

It was the first sound which had reached her ears since she had awoke, and she listened to it eagerly.

At first she could not tell what it was, but soon she became aware that it was caused by some one ascending the flight of stone steps.

Presently, the footsteps paused before the door, and then she heard the fastenings removed.

Immediately afterwards, a youth entered, whose appearance, to say the least of it, was very singular.

One glance, however, at the expressionless countenance and peculiar eyes would have served to show that he was deficient in intellect.

He was, indeed, what is usually called half-witted.

His mouth was expanded into a vacant, meaningless grin, and he nodded his head in a manner half painful, half amusing.

He carried in his hand a basket containing bread and wine.

He brought this forward and placed it down by the side of the fair prisoner, nodding and smiling incessantly while he did so.

Edgworth Bess gazed at her visitor in mingled surprise and pain.

At first she was unable to comprehend his extraordinary behaviour, but in a moment afterwards it flashed across her mind that he was an idiot.

If such was the case—and she felt quite sure of it,—there would be little use in putting any questions to him.

The answers he gave could not have been depended on; or, more probably still, he would not understand what was said to him.

Although aware of this, Edgworth Bess addressed him, fancying that perhaps she might be able to learn from him the motives for the behaviour of the banditti.

In a sad but gentle voice she spoke.

"Tell me," she cried, "why I have been brought to this place, and why I am kept a prisoner!"

The idiot boy smiled and nodded his head in the same way as before.

Edgworth Bess repeated her inquiry, but with no better result.

Just as she had finished speaking, however, a tall figure strode into the room.

Edgworth Bess had not heard this man ascending, and she looked up in fear.

That feeling changed to loathing and disgust when she saw that it was the bandit chief who had entered.

"I can answer your question best, pretty one!" he said. "It is no good to ask Crazy Carl anything. He is an idiot, and has been so from his birth. He would not understand what you said to him."

Upon the entrance of the bandit chief, the idiot boy—or Crazy Carl, as he had been called—shrank back, exhibiting every symptom of terror and affright.

He got close to the door, and seemed more than half inclined to beat an immediate retreat.

Edgworth Bess felt her heart fail her when she beheld the hideous countenance of the bandit chief, and for a moment she seemed as though she must faint.

By a powerful effort, however, she controlled this feeling, and endeavoured to assume a certain amount of calmness.

Rising to her feet, she confronted the bandit chief with a boldness that astonished even herself.

"Speak!" she said. "For what purpose have you brought me a prisoner to this place? Why am I kept here?"

The bandit chief laughed as he replied:

"Because I choose to do so!"

Edgworth Bess trembled, for, in spite of all that Ned Cattle had told her, she could not help thinking that Jonathan Wild was at the bottom of this outrage, and that she had been made prisoner in consequence of directions he had given.

In this supposition, as the reader knows very well, she was wrong.

Jonathan Wild had nothing to do with it.

Just at that moment the whole of his attention was required to look after himself.

"If it will be any consolation for you to know," continued the bandit chief, "I will tell you why you have been brought here and made a prisoner. It is in order that we may exact a ransom from your friends. Doubt-

less, they would willingly pay a good round sum to have you restored to them uninjured."

"If that is your calculation," said Edgworth Bess, "it is a vain one. I have no friends."

The bandit chief laughed incredulously.

"I know better!" he said. "You must have friends, and rich ones, too! I know that you expected two to come and join you. Doubtless they are as well off as yourself."

"You are mistaken," returned Edgworth Bess. "Two friends of mine, it is true, were about to join me, but they are not rich, and they would be unable to pay any ransom for my deliverance."

"Ah, well," returned the bandit chief, calmly, "we shall see! All prisoners say at first that they have no friends who will pay ransom for them; but when they have been shut up awhile, it is wonderful what an improvement takes place in their memory. They are sure to recollect some one or other who will come forward with the money necessary for their release."

Edgworth Bess remained silent, and the bandit chief, after a short pause, resumed:

"You will stay here until you tell me who your friends are, and where they are to be found. If you are obstinate, and refuse to do this, you will have to remain a prisoner. I am in no fear that you will escape. Strong men have been confined in this very chamber for many months; but not one of them ever managed to make their escape from it. I tell you all this for your own good. Weigh over what I have said. To-morrow I shall see you again, and by that time you will be able to realise your position."

With these words, the bandit chief turned on his heel and left the room.

Crazy Carl, as soon as he saw him approaching, rushed down the stairs with the utmost precipitation, leaving the bandit chief to secure the door himself.

Edgworth Bess listened to the creaking of the bolts, the sharp snap of the lock, and the retreating footsteps of the bandit chief with an aching heart.

Her situation seemed now to be more hopeless and forlorn than ever.

She knew it would be useless to apply to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard for money for her ransom.

She was, indeed, filled with an ever-increasing fear on their account.

She felt sure some misfortune had befallen them.

As the day advanced, she grew more serious and alarmed.

The least sound terrified her exceedingly, and she listened with suspended breath, for every moment she expected that the thief-taker would make his appearance.

The day wore away, however, without the occurrence of this expected event.

For a long time she stood at the grated window, looking out over the forest.

But although she stood there for a long time, she saw nothing living, and at last, quite wearied both in mind and body, she threw herself down upon the pallet.

There she remained throughout the night.

When darkness came, the bandits commenced another carouse.

The sounds distracted her, and she was unable to obtain the only consolation it was possible for her to have in her prison—namely, the unconsciousness of sleep.

The next morning the idiot boy again entered the apartment, bringing with him a fresh supply of provisions.

Edgworth Bess smiled sadly upon him as he entered.

Somehow, deprived of all intelligence as he was, she fancied he was a friend.

Nodding and smiling, he placed the basket down, and then started with astonishment upon perceiving that what he had brought on the preceding morning was untouched.

Edgworth Bess was about to speak, but Crazy Carl rapidly carried his finger to his lips as a sign for her to be silent.

This was a greater manifestation of intelligence than she had expected to receive.

Crazy Carl, having deposited the basket, stole on tiptoe to the door.

Then, leaning out, he placed his hand to his ear, and listened.

He was apparently satisfied that no one was near, and so he returned to the spot where he had previously stood.

"All right!" he muttered, smiling and nodding at every word. "All right—don't be afraid. Old Grimm not come this morning."

"Do you mean the man who came yesterday?"

The idiot nodded.

"Why not eat?" he said, pointing to the basket of provisions.

"I cannot."

As she spoke, Edgeworth Bess fancied that her visitor looked longingly upon the viands.

She wished to conciliate him, if possible, for the time might come when he would be able to render her a service.

Stooping down, then, she picked up one of the baskets and held it towards him, saying, as she did so:

"You are welcome."

The idiot's eyes grew brighter, and, taking the flask containing the wine, he nodded and smiled; then, placing it to his lips, kept it there until he had drained it to the last drop.

It was evident that he was much delighted, and by various signs endeavoured to show Edgeworth Bess how very grateful and pleased he felt.

She pressed him to partake of the bread, but this he refused to do unless she ate also.

More to humour him than to satisfy any natural cravings, she broke off a small piece of the loaf and began to eat, while the idiot devoured the remainder with avidity.

He seemed, indeed, to be half starved, and he bore about him many traces of ill-usage.

He was compelled to wait upon the bandits, hand and foot, and he found them no very gentle masters.

Without exception they all felt a brutal delight in torturing and tormenting him.

Kindness was totally unknown to him.

Edgeworth Bess was the first who had exhibited it, and so great was the impression made upon him, that he felt ready and willing to become her slave.

The company of this half-witted being was preferable to the solitude of that turret chamber, and doubtless Edgeworth Bess would have tempted him to remain much longer, but soon the poor fellow started and listened.

"Grimm!" he said, in a trembling voice—"he is coming!"

A heavy footstep could now be heard ascending the stairs.

Crazy Carl thrust the piece of bread he had been eating under his apparel, and, making another rapid sign for silence, he crept towards the door.

Trembling in every limb, and looking excessively frightened, he awaited the arrival of the bandit chief.

Up he came at the same deliberate speed.

Upon reaching the door, and finding it open, he uttered an angry growl.

His eye fell upon the trembling form of the poor idiot.

"Why do you linger here, fool?" he said, and, as he uttered the words, he struck Crazy Carl a violent blow with the scabbard of his sword.

"Begone!" he continued—"descend at once!"

Glad to escape further brutality, the idiot flew downstairs, leaving the bandit chief alone with his prisoner.

CHAPTER CCCLXXIV.

EDGEWORTH BESS AND CRAZY CARL ENDEAVOUR TO EFFECT AN ESCAPE FROM THE OLD RUIN.

EDGEWORTH BESS slunk back instinctively when the bandit chief entered.

He noticed the movement, but affected not to do so.

"Well, pretty one," he said, in a bantering tone, which was, of all others, most displeasing to the prisoner, "have you thought over your situation—have you weighed what I told you yesterday?"

He paused as if waiting for a reply, but Edgeworth Bess continued silent.

"Have you made up your mind," he continued, in a louder voice, "to trouble your friends for a ransom? I

am in no great hurry, only the longer you stay the more money will be required to purchase your freedom."

"I can only repeat what I said yesterday," replied Edgeworth Bess, speaking with much difficulty. "If your sole object in bringing me a prisoner to this place is to extract money from my friends, release me at once. I tell you again I have no friends—at least, none who would be able to pay any money for my ransom."

"You will think of some one in a day or two," said the bandit chief, calmly. "I have heard so many others tell the same tale, that I am tired of listening to it. As for letting you go, that is out of the question; I am determined to be recompensed for my trouble in some way or other!"

"I am in your power," said Edgeworth Bess, "and unable to make any effectual resistance. I shall, however, do my best to get free."

"You are welcome to try; but I have no time to waste in talking to you this morning. I must go, and all I shall say is, that I don't believe you when you say you have no friends who would pay money to have you set at liberty. It doesn't stand to reason that anyone with so much money and so many valuable articles as you and your companions carry about with you, should be without wealthy friends."

"You are mistaken," said Edgeworth Bess; "I have but two friends in the whole world, and they are the reverse of wealthy."

"Well, we shall see. The longer you stay, as I said yesterday, the greater the amount will be. It will advance a hundred pounds a day—that is the modest charge I shall make for your board and lodging."

With these words, the bandit chief again left the room.

His bantering, half-sneering, half-jocular manner distressed Edgeworth Bess exceedingly.

She knew not what to make of it, but something seemed to tell her that she had much to dread from such a man.

During the remainder of the day her solitude was not broken in upon, and so of course no incident occurred needing any description.

The fair prisoner had no other companion than her own thoughts, and these were sad enough.

The next morning, at the usual time, the idiot boy paid another visit to the cell.

As he entered, Edgeworth Bess could not help noticing the expression of his countenance.

He seemed to be overjoyed about something.

"What is the matter?" asked Edgeworth Bess, curiously; "what has happened?"

"He, he!" laughed the idiot, "Old Grimm went out yesterday, and he's not come back yet."

The poor girl felt her hopes rise upon hearing this intelligence.

"Gone out?" she said, "and the men too?"

"Not all."

"How many remain?"

"Four."

Her hopes sank again.

For a moment she fancied that she had a chance of making her escape, but now there was an end to that idea.

Recollecting, however, the pleasure with which the idiot had partaken of the bread and wine on the preceding morning, she again offered him the basket.

He ate as greedily as before.

"You are kind to Crazy Carl," he said—"everybody else gives me hard blows."

Edgeworth Bess was surprised to hear him speak so rationally; she didn't believe that he possessed so much intelligence.

The fact was, occasionally the poor fellow had lucid intervals.

The present was one of them, but they were invariably succeeded by a state of helpless imbecility.

"Do you understand what a prisoner is?" asked Edgeworth Bess.

"Yes, I know—you are one."

"I am," she returned, hope once more reviving in her breast.

There was a possibility, she thought, of winning this boy by kindness to serve her.

"I want to get away," she said.

Carl shook his head slowly.

"You can't."

"Can you help me?"

"No—no. If I did, old Grimm would kill me!"

"But should you not like to leave this place?"

This seemed a fresh thought to the poor idiot, and he passed his hand restlessly over his brow.

"Leave here?" he repeated.

"Yes; should you not like to go away—should you not like to go with me to some place where everyone would be kind to you, and where Grimm could not come?"

"Can't be," he said—"can't leave here."

"Why not?"

The idiot shuddered.

"We should have to go into the forest," he said.

"And what of that?"

"Ghosts!" he said, with a shudder—"evil spirits—demons with long arms, who would twine them round and round you, and hold you till you died! The forest is full of them! I could not go in the forest!"

Edgworth Bess looked at her strange companion in wonder.

She was at a loss to think where he had imbibed such notions; but, after a little reflection, she came to the conclusion that the bandit chief and his followers had impressed these horrible ideas upon his mind, in order to prevent him leaving the ruins, which were surrounded by the forest.

She could tell that his alarm was real, and she feared that without she could change the current of his thoughts, she would fall into his idiotic state.

"Have some more wine," she said, "and some more bread. You will be strong then, and the evil spirits in the forest will not be able to harm you."

He could not reconcile himself to this idea.

The utmost pains had been taken to excite his terror, and it would have been a very difficult matter to remove the impressions then made.

How to disabuse his mind of these ideas Edgworth Bess was at a loss to think.

The desire of making her escape, and her belief that her sole chance of doing so rested in the being before her, sharpened her inventive powers, and soon a fresh thought struck her.

"Carl," she said, "should you like to go away with me, if it was not to the forest?"

"I should—I should!" he replied, his eyes gleaming with something like intelligence. "I should, but I dare not go to the forest!"

"Does Grimm go?"

"Oh yes!"

"And all his men?"

"Yes."

"And do the evil spirits ever hurt them?"

"No."

"Then, why should they hurt you?"

Carl pressed both his hands over his head, and seemed as though he was trying to think, or as though he was endeavoring to grasp at this new idea.

"But I am a poor idiot," he said, at length, "and Grimm and his men are not. The evil spirits would hurt the poor idiot!"

"Not if I was with you," said Edgworth Bess, quickly, as this new thought struck her—"not if I am with you! I shall be able to keep away the evil spirits, and in a little while we should be out of the forest."

"Could you keep them away?" asked the idiot boy, doubtfully.

"I could indeed!"

"Her confident tone and manner produced a remarkable effect upon him, and he seemed almost inclined to believe her.

"Can you not take me downstairs," said Edgworth Bess, "and out into the forest, without our being seen by anyone? If you can do that all will be well! I will answer for the rest. I am not afraid of the evil spirits, and the demons with the long arms, and I can keep them from hurting you. Will you try?"

Carl hesitated.

The poor fellow seemed quite bewildered.

Doubtless his brain had never been so taxed before.

"Do you know where those four men are?"

"In the large room."

"Then, could we not creep downstairs silently and get into the forest without them seeing or hearing us? It is worth while, Carl, for you will be happy; you will have plenty to eat and drink, and no one will illtreat you; you will have no more hard blows."

These last words appeared to contain some powerful inducement, for Carl took Edgworth Bess by the hand and led her to the door of the apartment.

How the poor girl's heart beat!

She was so agitated that she could scarcely move or breathe.

The road to escape she fully believed lay plain and clear before her. Once out into the forest, and then she felt she should have nothing to fear.

Carl drew her across the threshold; and she was about to put her foot upon the first step, when a loud voice was heard shouting below.

An immediate change came over the idiot.

He trembled and shook, and became the helpless being he was when he first entered the apartment.

"Grimm!" he murmured—"Grimm!"

Edgworth Bess felt there was only one course she could adopt, and that was to retire into the cell again, reluctant as she was to do so.

The bandit chief called loudly upon Carl, and the sound of his voice so alarmed the idiot that he could scarcely close and fasten the door.

He did so, however, and then descended.

Edgworth Bess placed her ear against the keyhole and listened.

She heard loud shrieks of pain, accompanied with a sound of heavy blows, which told her that the bandit chief was again illtreating his helpless dependent.

In a little while, however, these sounds ceased, and all became silent.

Edgworth Bess felt this disappointment bitterly, and she shed many tears.

She made sure of being able to escape.

She fancied that in a few moments, at the most, she should have been in the open air, and now she was as much a prisoner as before.

She wept until she was quite exhausted, and then sank off into a deep slumber.

She was awakened by feeling some one touch her on the arm.

She started up in terror, fully expecting to behold the countenance of the bandit chief.

To her joy, however, she found that it was Crazy Carl.

"Hush!" he said—"don't make a noise!"

He seemed more rational than ever.

Edgworth Bess now noticed for the first time that it was night, and that the chamber was only illuminated by the moon.

"Why are you here, Carl?" she asked, kindly.

"I want you to take me away," he said; "you promised to take me where old Grimm could not come, and where I should have no more hard blows. I would go by myself, only I am frightened at the spirits. Take me with you! Let us go now! Are you sure you can keep away the spirits?"

Edgworth Bess started to her feet.

Hope sprang up in her breast.

"I will take you, Carl," she said, "and gladly. Are you sure we can reach the forest unperceived?"

"Oh yes, I know the way. I can take you easily."

"I will undertake to do that," said Edgworth Bess, with a smile, "if you will do the rest."

"Come then, now—follow me down the stairs."

Gladly Edgworth Bess complied.

But when she again reached the head of the stairs, she feared she should be unable to descend.

Every instant she expected to hear the dreaded voice of the bandit chief.

A deeper silence, however, than she could recollect having before experienced, reigned around, and reassured by it, she took the idiot's hand, and the pair stole noiselessly down the spiral staircase.

Every now and then the poor girl would have to pause and gather strength to proceed.

She was giddy, and faint with apprehension.

Lower and lower down the staircase they went, slowly but yet noiselessly.

As she got further from her prison, Edgworth Bess felt her courage revive.

And now that they had got so far down the staircase in safety, there appeared to be a probability of accomplishing the remainder of the descent.

"Stop!" said the idiot, suddenly, "there is a door here, which we must go through."



[EDGORTH BESS AND THE IDIOT ESCAPING FROM THE BANDITTI'S STRONGHOLD.]

He cautiously withdrew the bolts, and then led Edgworth Bess into a chamber into which the moon was shining.

The silvery light showed that this chamber was in a state of great dilapidation; the walls were crumbled and broken, and the floor was covered with fragments of masonry.

At the further extremity was a large, irregularly-shaped opening in the wall, which had in all probability been a window.

Towards this the idiot led the way.

Upon reaching it he paused, and Edgworth Bess looked with curiosity about her.

This opening in the wall was a considerable distance from the ground, and she wondered what could have been the idiot's motive for bringing her there.

She looked, but she was unable to perceive any means by which they might descend.

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Her heart seemed to turn cold, and she went very faint, for the thought came over her that the idiot had relapsed into his old condition, and had brought her there without any definite object.

In all likelihood she was as far off making her escape as ever.

As this distressing thought crossed her mind she turned her head towards her companion.

The bright rays of the moon shone full upon his countenance, revealing every feature with great distinctness.

Edgworth Bess started when she beheld it.

His eyes appeared to have an unnatural glare, and were rolling wildly in their sockets, while a general quivering of his whole frame and other unmistakable symptoms showed that he was suffering from extreme fright.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXV.

EDGORTH BESS SUCCEEDS IN MAKING HER ESCAPE FROM THE BANDITTI'S STRONGHOLD.

EDGORTH BESS felt her very heart turn sick when the thought occurred to her that she was being made the victim of the idiot's imbecility.

No doubt he had wandered without any purpose to that strange apartment; or if he possessed any ray of intelligence when starting, it seemed to have departed.

There could be no mistaking the fact, however, that the expression on his countenance was caused by the most abject fear.

It was the same expression as she had seen when the bandit chief ascended to the turret chamber.

Was it possible that he was now at hand?

The thought seemed sufficient to drive her into madness. She felt that if she failed in her attempt to escape on this occasion, such precaution would afterwards be taken that she would not have the slightest chance of gaining her freedom again.

Crazy Carl still continued to tremble, and his eyes to roll wildly in their orbits.

Edgworth Bess took hold of him by the arm, and endeavoured to arrest his attention.

After a time she succeeded.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in an anxious whisper. "What is it that has so greatly alarmed you? Can you see or hear anyone? What is it?—what has happened?"

"Grimm!" said the idiot, through his chattering teeth—"Grimm!"

"Where?" asked Edgworth Bess—"where?"

"I can hear him!" said Crazy Carl—"I can hear him quite plain!"

Edgworth Bess, upon hearing these words, at once assumed a listening attitude, but to her no sound was audible save the rustling of the tree-tops as they were slightly agitated by the wind.

"I cannot hear him," she said, after a pause. "You must have been mistaken! Shake off this terror! Remember, I am with you, and will protect you! Do not fear any of the evil spirits in the forest!"

Carl grew calmer, and he murmured:

"He is gone now—he is gone! I am sure I heard him, and fancied he had discovered your flight. But he is gone now; let us fly at once!"

"Why have you brought me to this place?" said Edgworth Bess, once more approaching the opening in the wall. "We are a great distance from the ground. Why did you not descend the remainder of the steps?"

Carl shook his head.

"Wouldn't do!" he replied. "Men are at the bottom of the steps, and we could not pass without their knowing it. This is the only way."

"But how can we descend?" said Edgworth Bess, her fears being now considerably allayed.

"I will show you. It is not so hard as you think. Come this way."

Edgworth Bess was almost frightened at her strange companion, and almost hesitated to accompany him to the opening in the wall.

She could not tell what sudden freak his disordered intellect might impel him to attempt upon getting her there. He might throw her off her balance, and she would fall to the earth and be killed.

It was only for a moment that Edgworth Bess allowed this thought to retain the mastery over her.

She looked into the idiot's countenance, which was fully revealed by the moonbeams falling upon it, and she felt that she could trust him.

His face was calm; the vacant look which generally characterised it had disappeared, while his mouth was no longer drawn up into the usual grin.

She approached, then, to the very edge of the wall, where Crazy Carl was standing.

He pointed downwards, and said:

"Look, can you see that broad wall a little way below us?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, you will find it easy to get down upon it, and from there on to the roof, and from the roof to the ground."

The poor girl trembled. It looked a desperate feat, and

had she not been urged forward by her terrible position, in all probability she would not have attempted to make such a perilous descent.

"I will show you," said Carl. "It is very easy; I have done it myself a hundred times. Look."

He stooped down as he spoke, and cautiously lowered himself over the abyss, until he hung down at the full length of his arms. His feet then rested on the wall which he had pointed out, and which was, in reality, very much wider than it appeared to be when viewed from above.

"Now," he said, "descend in the same way as I did. I will stand here and assist you. Do not fear—all will be well!"

Edgworth Bess feared that she would be unable to accomplish this feat, but then she thought of her prison, of the hideous bandit chief, and lastly of Jack Sheppard, who doubtless was wandering about in the forest and encountering a thousand dangers while seeking for her.

This gave her strength and resolution.

Quickly and carefully she imitated the actions of the idiot boy, and lowered herself down.

He stood on the wall and steadied her as she descended.

In another moment, with her heart beating at a terrible rate, she was standing on the wall.

It was at least two feet wide, so that to walk upon it was an easy enough matter.

Crazy Carl was evidently familiar with the route, for he walked along the wall with great ease and confidence, at the same time assisting Edgworth Bess to follow him.

At last the extremity was reached, and the idiot pointed out a steep, sloping roof.

"We shall have to slip down that," he said, "but you will find the task much easier than it looks to be. Come, I will assist you."

Edgworth Bess committed herself to the care of the idiot, for she felt more confidence in him now than she had hitherto done.

She found he was quite right; the task of slipping down the roof was not half so difficult as she made sure it would be.

By the time she had reached the lowest part, she discovered that she was at least twelve feet from the level ground.

"I will go first," said Crazy Carl, "and when I tell you to do so, you must drop, and I will catch you. You need not be terrified, for you will not be hurt."

The idiot lowered himself to the ground, and then caught Edgworth Bess, who was thus saved from any injury from the fall.

Now she was once more standing on firm earth, the young girl felt her courage rise wonderfully, and she believed that she should be fully equal to the remainder of her task.

She paused for a moment just where she was, in order to look around her.

The old ruin in which the banditti had taken up their quarters was very picturesque and beautiful.

It was, too, of considerable extent; some portions of it were much decayed, while others seemed to have escaped the ravages of time.

The donjon or keep, at the top of which she had been confined, was the most prominent object.

She looked up, and near the top could just perceive a tiny loop-hole closely barred.

That was the window that looked into her prison.

At first Crazy Carl looked about him with great apprehension, but by degrees his spirits rose when he found that the profound stillness was unbroken.

"Come!" said Edgworth Bess. "Our flight has not yet been discovered, but we cannot tell how soon it may be. Let us fly while we have the opportunity, for the further we can get from this place the better chance we shall have of escaping, should a search be made for us."

She advanced towards the trees as she spoke, and Crazy Carl followed her, though with a hesitating, reluctant step.

Edgworth Bess perceived this, and encouraged him to come forward.

When he was fairly beneath the shadow of the trees his terrors rapidly increased.

All those frightful tales which had been so artfully impressed upon his mind by the banditti respecting the inmates of the forest thronged thickly upon his brain.

Edgworth Bess saw how rapidly his terror was increasing, and it was clear that, unless she could do something to inspire him with courage, it would increase to such a degree that he would not follow her.

It is true that, in the hour of danger, he would more likely be an encumbrance than aught else, but somehow Edgworth Bess fancied she was more secure when she had some one with her.

The thought of wandering through that immense forest by herself was a fearful one, but if she had company, the enterprise was shorn of half its terrors.

"Why do you hang back?" she said. "Why do you seem so frightened? You must put trust in me—I have told you that I will save you from all the evil spirits who inhabit this forest, and I will be as good as my word. While I am with you not one of them will have the power to do you the least harm!"

"Are you sure?"

"I am quite sure. I tell you again, if you will only keep by my side no harm will befall you. The evil spirits will not dare to emerge or show themselves!"

The confident tone in which Edgworth Bess spoke produced a great effect upon the idiot's mind; but for all that, he hung back.

Suddenly both were startled by a loud blast upon a horn, which rang out clear and loud through the silent forest.

Edgworth Bess uttered a faint scream of terror.

The sound came from the direction of the ruin, and the only cause to which it could be attributed was that their escape had been discovered.

The horn was blown again.

Edgworth Bess seemed as though she was about to sink into the earth.

All her strength left her, and her brain reeled.

So great was the horror, however, which the bandit chief had inspired in her heart, and so much did she dread being taken back to her prison, that she was enabled to shake off this feeling, and, grasping the idiot by the arm, she said:

"Fly—fly!—be quick and fly! If you linger, old Grimm and his men will have us, and they will torture you, and me as well!"

Crazy Carl's terror was very great—so great, indeed, as almost to deprive him of the power of motion; but when Edgworth Bess spoke, he aroused himself a little.

She took hold of him by the hand, and plunged at random among the trees.

He followed her mechanically.

Intense fear enabled the fugitives to make great speed, but before they had gone far they heard sounds in the rear, which unmistakably proclaimed that the banditti were in pursuit and making close search after them.

As she hurried on, forcing her way through thickets and tangled undergrowth, the poor girl could hear the banditti shouting to each other, and also the trampling of their heavy feet, still she flew onwards, until at length she emerged into an open glade in the forest, in which nothing but soft green turf was growing.

Along this she bounded at a speed that was truly wonderful, Crazy Carl keeping pace with her from the mere force of imitation.

Still the banditti could be heard in the rear, and from the loudness of the sounds, it seemed that they were gaining rapidly upon the fugitives.

They were accustomed to travelling through the forest, and no doubt were well acquainted with its inmost recesses.

This would be a great advantage, for they would be able to keep upon the track of the fugitives.

Like some poor wounded deer, Edgworth Bess still continued to bound onward.

She drew her breath with difficulty, and her limbs seemed to fail her, still she struggled on.

Her companion seemed no less exhausted than herself. At length she felt that she could not possibly go any further.

What with fear and what with fatigue, her strength was utterly exhausted.

The banditti did not appear to be so close behind as they had been hitherto.

But still they could be heard with great distinctness.

"I can run no farther," said Edgworth Bess. "My strength is quite spent. We must try and hide ourselves among these bushes. I should think we shall be safe. The banditti, fancying we are in advance, may pass us by, and then we shall escape."

CHAPTER CCCCLXXVI.

EDGWORTH BESS AND CRAZY CARL HAVE SOME PERILOUS ADVENTURES IN THE FOREST.

CRAZY CARL was quite as glad to rest as Edgworth Bess, and he consented to hide himself without hesitation.

The undergrowth was very dense, and Edgworth Bess fancied that she would be able to conceal herself amongst it without much difficulty, and in such a manner as to leave no trace to show the banditti where they were.

With beating heart and trembling limbs, she laid herself down at full length upon the ground.

The fern and brake, and the rest of the rank vegetation completely hid her from sight.

Crazy Carl was close by.

She could not see him, but she could hear him panting for breath.

She listened with the greatest anxiety to the sounds which came from the banditti.

Every moment the voices grew more and more distinct, and again she could hear the trampling of their feet as they forced their way through the bushes.

From the manner in which they shouted to each other, it would seem that they were advancing in a line, each man being separated from his comrade by a distance of several feet.

The nearer they came the more terrified Edgworth Bess felt, and she was afraid that, after all, her hiding-place would be discovered, and she would be led back to the ruin a prisoner.

But she could do nothing save remain perfectly still where she was.

The least movement would have the effect of betraying her to her foes.

It was too late to rise and fly.

On came the banditti at a rapid pace, until at length they reached the place where the fugitives were concealed.

They halted only a few feet from the bushes beneath which they were hidden, and Edgworth Bess heard the bandit chief address his men in angry, growling tones.

He commanded them to search in every direction, and not to give up the pursuit until they had accomplished their purpose.

He told them the danger that would result from this girl remaining at liberty, inasmuch as she would communicate with the authorities, and an attack would be made upon their secret stronghold.

In addition to all this, which was quite enough to make his men use every effort, he offered on his own account a large reward for the recovery of Edgworth Bess, for, from secret reasons of his own, he much desired to recover possession of her.

Lying hidden under the brushwood, the poor girl was compelled to listen to all that was said, and she shuddered fearfully, lest one of the band should make some movement and discover her.

It was clear that the banditti had lost the track, and they now dispersed themselves around, in the hope that they should be able to discover some signs of those they sought.

Edgworth Bess and Crazy Carl narrowly escaped detection, but by great good fortune the banditti, although they marched about in every direction, passed by their hiding-place.

In a few minutes all had left the spot, and the sounds of the footsteps of their foes grew fainter and fainter each moment.

Quite half an hour elapsed before Edgworth Bess sufficiently recovered from her alarm to rise to her feet; at the expiration of that time, however, she did so, and commanded the idiot to rise also.

Looking literally frightened to death, Crazy Carl rose up and looked about him.

"Old Grimm is gone," said Edgworth Bess, "that is

CHAPTER CCOCLXXV.

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It was the same expression as she had seen when the bandit chief ascended to the turret chamber.

Was it possible that he was now at hand?

The thought seemed sufficient to drive her into madness. She felt that if she failed in her attempt to escape on this occasion, such precaution would afterwards be taken that she would not have the slightest chance of gaining her freedom again.

Crazy Carl still continued to tremble, and his eyes to roll wildly in their orbits.

Edgworth Bess took hold of him by the arm, and endeavoured to arrest his attention.

After a time she succeeded.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in an anxious whisper. "What is it that has so greatly alarmed you? Can you see or hear anyone? What is it?—what has happened?"

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"Why have you brought me to this place?" said Edgworth Bess, once more approaching the opening in the wall. "We are a great distance from the ground. Why did you not descend the remainder of the steps?"

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"But how can we descend?" said Edgworth Bess, her fears being now considerably allayed.

"I will show you. It is not so hard as you think. Come this way."

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All her strength left her, and her brain reeled.

So great was the horror, however, which the bandit chief had inspired in her heart, and so much did she dread being taken back to her prison, that she was enabled to shake off this feeling, and, grasping the idiot by the arm, she said:

"Fly—fly!—be quick and fly! If you linger, old Grimm and his men will have us, and they will torture you, and me as well!"

Crazy Carl's terror was very great—so great, indeed, as almost to deprive him of the power of motion; but when Edgworth Bess spoke, he aroused himself a little.

She took hold of him by the hand, and plunged at random among the trees.

He followed her mechanically.

Intense fear enabled the fugitives to make great speed, but before they had gone far they heard sounds in the rear, which unmistakably proclaimed that the banditti were in pursuit and making close search after them.

As she hurried on, forcing her way through thickets and tangled undergrowth, the poor girl could hear the banditti shouting to each other, and also the trampling of their heavy feet, still she flew onwards, until at length she emerged into an open glade in the forest, in which nothing but soft green turf was growing.

Along this she bounded at a speed that was truly wonderful, Crazy Carl keeping pace with her from the mere force of imitation.

Still the banditti could be heard in the rear, and from the loudness of the sounds, it seemed that they were gaining rapidly upon the fugitives.

They were accustomed to travelling through the forest, and no doubt were well acquainted with its inmost recesses.

This would be a great advantage, for they would be able to keep upon the track of the fugitives.

Like some poor wounded deer, Edgworth Bess still continued to bound onward.

She drew her breath with difficulty, and her limbs seemed to fail her, still she struggled on.

Her companion seemed no less exhausted than herself. At length she felt that she could not possibly go any further.

What with fear and what with fatigue, her strength was utterly exhausted.

The banditti did not appear to be so close behind as they had been hitherto.

But still they could be heard with great distinctness.

"I can run no farther," said Edgworth Bess. "My strength is quite spent. We must try and hide ourselves among these bushes. I should think we shall be safe. The banditti, fancying we are in advance, may pass us by, and then we shall escape."

CHAPTER CCCLXXVI.

EDGWORTH BESS AND CRAZY CARL HAVE SOME PERILOUS ADVENTURES IN THE FOREST.

CRAZY CARL was quite as glad to rest as Edgworth Bess, and he consented to hide himself without hesitation.

The undergrowth was very dense, and Edgworth Bess fancied that she would be able to conceal herself amongst it without much difficulty, and in such a manner as to leave no trace to show the banditti where they were.

With beating heart and trembling limbs, she laid herself down at full length upon the ground.

The fern and brake, and the rest of the rank vegetation completely hid her from sight.

Crazy Carl was close by.

She could not see him, but she could hear him panting for breath.

She listened with the greatest anxiety to the sounds which came from the banditti.

Every moment the voices grew more and more distinct, and again she could hear the trampling of their feet as they forced their way through the bushes.

From the manner in which they shouted to each other, it would seem that they were advancing in a line, each man being separated from his comrade by a distance of several feet.

The nearer they came the more terrified Edgworth Bess felt, and she was afraid that, after all, her hiding-place would be discovered, and she would be led back to the ruin a prisoner.

But she could do nothing save remain perfectly still where she was.

The least movement would have the effect of betraying her to her foes.

It was too late to rise and fly.

On came the banditti at a rapid pace, until at length they reached the place where the fugitives were concealed.

They halted only a few feet from the bushes beneath which they were hidden, and Edgworth Bess heard the bandit chief address his men in angry, growling tones.

He commanded them to search in every direction, and not to give up the pursuit until they had accomplished their purpose.

He told them the danger that would result from this girl remaining at liberty, inasmuch as she would communicate with the authorities, and an attack would be made upon their secret stronghold.

In addition to all this, which was quite enough to make his men use every effort, he offered on his own account a large reward for the recovery of Edgworth Bess, for, from secret reasons of his own, he much desired to recover possession of her.

Lying hidden under the brushwood, the poor girl was compelled to listen to all that was said, and she shuddered fearfully, lest one of the band should make some movement and discover her.

It was clear that the banditti had lost the track, and they now dispersed themselves around, in the hope that they should be able to discover some signs of those they sought.

Edgworth Bess and Crazy Carl narrowly escaped detection, but by great good fortune the banditti, although they marched about in every direction, passed by their hiding-place.

In a few minutes all had left the spot, and the sounds of the footsteps of their foes grew fainter and fainter each moment.

Quite half an hour elapsed before Edgworth Bess sufficiently recovered from her alarm to rise to her feet; at the expiration of that time, however, she did so, and commanded the idiot to rise also.

Looking literally frightened to death, Crazy Carl rose up and looked about him.

"Old Grimm is gone," said Edgworth Bess. "that is

imagination the reins too freely; she had been terrifying herself unnecessarily.

The white object was nothing more than a monument of rather peculiar shape, and formed of some kind of white stone-like marble.

Its shape was very rude and grotesque.

Finding out what it really was, she did not hesitate to go close up to it in order to make an examination of it.

The interior of the cave situated in the heart of a forest seemed a strange place for the erection of a monument.

Her curiosity was raised in spite of the dangers and difficulties of her position; she felt it would be a satisfaction if she could ascertain something about it.

Holding the light close to the stone, she saw that the monument was in an advanced state of decay.

In every part it bore witness of its great antiquity.

She walked completely round it without being able to discover anything more than she already knew.

On one side were some words rendered almost illegible by the effects of time.

These no doubt would afford a clue to the presence of a monument in so strange a place, and it was with great eagerness that she stooped down and tried to make the letters out.

In a little while she found that the inscription itself was not only almost illegible, but also in a language which she did not understand.

In about the middle of the stone slab were some figures.

There were four of them placed close together, and no doubt expressed the date at which the monument had been erected.

She had much trouble in deciphering them, but at last succeeded.

As she expected, the figures formed a date, and that date was 1214.

This was but scanty information to obtain, and did not serve in any way to reveal the meaning of the presence of the monument.

For the present, however, that seemed to be the only information she was likely to obtain.

While continuing her researches, she was aroused by Crazy Carl, who touched her on the shoulder and said:

"Listen!"

The poor girl's heart beat so violently that for a minute or two it was the only sound she was able to distinguish. Presently, however, she heard the murmur of voices.

The sound clearly came from the forest, or rather from that portion of it just outside the entrance of the cavern.

The wild boar rose to his feet, uttering angry cries.

"Grimm," said the idiot—"Grimm and his men are outside."

"But there's a wild boar between us," said Edgworth Bess, in a whisper. "We may be safe yet. Let us stand behind this monument; we shall be able to conceal the light and also to listen."

This was done.

The next moment the forms of the banditti appeared at the entrance to the cavern.

It was evident that they intended to enter, but all drew back with great suddenness when they heard the boar uttering those angry cries.

From their long residence in the forest, they knew full well what those sounds meant.

The wild boar is at all times a dangerous animal, and one requiring much courage and skill to slay or capture.

By the peculiar cry which this one uttered, they could tell that it was badly wounded, and with the instinct possessed by so many wild beasts, had sought its own lair either to lie down and die, or to recover from its hurts.

It is while in such a state as this that the wild boar is most dangerous to attack.

Pain fills it with ungovernable rage, and it seems blind to everything.

When thus forced to bay, the banditti knew that it was no uncommon thing for a wild boar to rush forward and attack many men, and, before they could defend themselves, do serious injury.

Consequently, when they heard the sound, they drew back with the utmost precipitancy.

They did this all the more quickly, because, not long before, several had seen this boar and wantonly wounded it. They had noticed then that its size was almost gigantic—not one could remember having seen one so large.

To attack it while wounded and lying in its den required a much greater amount of courage than any of the banditti possessed.

They halted just outside the cavern, however, and consulted together as to what was to be done.

Independently of the boar, the greater portion of the banditti seemed very reluctant to enter the cavern. The chief, however, had seen the glimmer of a light within, and at once jumped to the conclusion that the fugitives were there.

He was compelled either to come to this conclusion, or else confess that they had eluded him altogether, for they had been searching many hours, and had not been able to obtain the least clue.

"We will have the boar out," said the bandit chief. "I am determined to enter the cavern, and ascertain whether the fugitives have taken refuge in it or not; there are quite enough of us to overcome the wild boar, even if he was twice as large and twice as furious as he is!"

The banditti did not seem to be of this opinion, but their chief was despotic, and so great was the influence he had over them that not one dared to grumble or refuse.

"I will show you how to get him out," he said, "and as soon as he makes his appearance fire and kill him; after that the rest will be easy. Now, then, look to your firearms, and be ready to shoot the moment I give the word!"

The bandits obeyed, and the chief, with a long spear in his hand, went towards the entrance of the cavern.

Standing close to the side, he began to poke about with the spear, and all the time hissed loudly like a serpent.

The bandits all looked on anxiously, and their admiration of their chief's courage was very great.

At first no notice whatever was taken by the wild boar of these proceedings; suddenly, however, with an awful roar that seemed to shake the very cavern, and which caused Crazy Carl to fall flat to the earth, and Edgworth Bess almost to faint, the wild boar rushed forth.

He came out like a hurricane.

"Now," said the chief, "fire! and, be quick—if you don't, he will return, and we shall have had our trouble for nothing!"

The banditti raised their weapons and fired.

The report of so many firearms was something tremendous, and when the smoke had cleared away a little, there lay the wild boar rolling over and over in the agonies of death.

"Come on," said the bandit chief, and he waved his sword as he spoke; "we shall have no further trouble with him—come on, I say, I feel convinced they are in the cavern, and now we shall quickly have them!"

His followers set up a disorderly shout and rushed after him into the cavern.

"All is over," moaned Edgworth Bess, as she heard them coming—"all is over; it is no good to resist any longer!"

CHAPTER CCCLXXVIII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD COMMENCE A PURSUIT AFTER EDGORTH BESS.

NED CANTLE'S escape from death was neither more nor less than miraculous.

Although seriously wounded in the throat by a pistol-bullet, covered with burns from head to foot, and badly crushed with the rubbish which had fallen upon him, still, when he was extricated from the ruins of the burning house he was, as we have already seen, well enough to give important information to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

But after he had told them that the cottage had been attacked and Edgworth Bess carried off by German banditti, he fell back as it appeared perfectly lifeless.

It had cost him a terrible effort to speak at all, and now that he had communicated the intelligence he was utterly exhausted.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard were to a certain extent prepared to hear some terrible tidings, but yet their fears had hardly made them suppose anything so dreadful as that the poor girl had been made a prisoner and carried off they knew not whither.

For several moments they were completely overwhelmed.

Jack Sheppard, who was kneeling down, clasped his

hands over his face, and uttering a deep groan, gave full vent to his grief.

For a moment Blueskin seemed stunned.

It took that length of time to realise the dreadful news he had received.

The sight of Ned Cantle lying upon the ground enabled him to recover himself, and he immediately turned all his attention to his unfortunate comrade.

He presented a truly deplorable spectacle.

The blood had flowed from the wound in his neck in incredible quantities, and he was completely saturated with it.

The bruised and burnt condition of his body was enough to make the stoutest heart quail to look on.

All hope of recovery was at an end.

No one could receive such frightful injuries as those and outlive them.

All that Blueskin or anyone else in the world could do was to make his passage out of this world easier.

"Can you speak again," said Blueskin, bending over him—"is there anything that I can do for you—have you no request to make—is there no message you would like me to deliver?"

The muscles round Ned Cantle's mouth twitched convulsively, and after several inarticulate efforts he managed with great difficulty to gasp out, "Water—water!"

Some water was procured from the little well and poured down his throat.

The draught seemed to revive him greatly, but along with returning consciousness, seemed to come great pain, for he uttered several dreadful groans.

He subdued them with great difficulty, and then in a hollow voice he said:

"I fancy plunder was the wretches' object—they knew that we had money. I have already told you that they carried off poor Edgworth Bess."

"Yes, yes," said Jack Sheppard, "but can you tell where?"

"No more than I already have done—they have carried her into the forest."

"But for what object?"

Ned shook his head.

"Do you think they are in any way connected with Jonathan Wild—do you think they are acting for him?"

Ned Cantle shook his head again.

"Raise me up a little," he said slowly—"there, that will do. I am going—going fast—I can tell that by the strange light that is around me. Good-bye, Blueskin—good-bye, Jack—it is all over with me!"

Our two friends were deeply affected, for though their acquaintance with Ned Cantle had been short, yet for all that it had been long enough to show them that he was a staunch, true friend, and they were already deeply indebted to him.

There was a short pause, and then Blueskin said:

"Is there no message you wish delivered—is there no one that you would like to know your fate?"

"Only the old boys in the cavern—you know where, Blueskin, and you, Jack. When you get back to England, if ever you do, I should like you to go there and tell them what has been my fate."

Ned closed his eyes, and his head fell back as though the muscles of the neck had suddenly lost all strength.

Blueskin and Jack thought he was dead.

But he was not.

"Water! water," he cried. "Let me have plenty of it. I burn—I burn!"

More water was fetched by the widow's deformed son. While he was gone, Ned said:

"I defended her to the last—I did all I could to keep them off, but their numbers were too great. I expected that you would make your appearance every moment, and if you had there might have been a chance. If you had only come a few hours sooner, all would have been well."

"Here is the water."

"Thanks! You will search for her, of course—I know you will. She is perhaps not far from here. I wish I could accompany you, for I know the forest well; but—but that is all over. Good-bye to you both! Water—water!"

Blueskin placed the water to Ned's lips and continued to pour it down his throat, until at length he ceased to swallow it.

There was a slight shudder, a sudden contraction of the limbs, and all was over.

Ned Cantle's sufferings had passed.

He was dead.

Several minutes elapsed before our friends spoke or moved.

Jack Sheppard was the first to rise to his feet.

He stepped up to Blueskin, and touching him on the shoulder, said:

"Rise—rise—it is all over with Ned now, poor fellow; we can do no good for him. Don't let us lose any more time—let us commence the search at once. Who can tell what peril the poor girl is in by this time?"

Blueskin rose.

"Yes," he said, "we will begin the search at once. At least, before we start there is one duty we must perform."

"And what is that?"

"To bury Ned—it is the last and only service we can render him. If he remains here he will become the prey of all the wild beasts in the forest, and that is too horrible to think of."

"It is indeed," said Jack. "I would even save my worst foe from such a fate as that."

They were but ill provided with the necessary tools for digging a grave, but, going to the borders of the forest, where the soil was soft, they managed to hollow out a hole large and deep enough for their purpose.

It was, however, a labour which consumed a great deal of time, and when they had finished the day was far advanced.

Ned's body was placed in the grave and the earth filled in. They hammered it down hard and flat, so that none of the wolves or other ravenous creatures which infested the forest should be able to unbury it.

When this was over, our two friends refreshed themselves by a draught of water from the well, and then they commenced their search.

There were marks of many heavy feet on the ground surrounding the spot upon which the woodman's hut had stood, and these Blueskin examined with great care and attention.

By looking closely, he was at last enabled to discern a kind of track which led towards the forest.

They followed it carefully, and Blueskin said:

"How much I regret Ned Cantle's loss! Had he been with us our task would have been much easier. You heard him say that he knew the forest well."

"He did."

"And think what an advantage that must be. Here are we, and neither of us have seen it in our lives before."

"No, but it is useless to regret now he is dead."

"He is, poor fellow, and it will be a long time before we find another who will be to us what he has been."

The track which they had followed became fainter and fainter, until at last, when they were fairly among the trees, it was invisible.

Their search did indeed seem to be a hopeless one.

When approaching the hut, they had seen from the distance that the forest was of immense extent, and, without the slightest clue as they were, they might wander through it for weeks and months without finding what they sought.

Chance was their only guide.

It mattered little which way they took.

To them all paths were the same, and one was just as likely to be right as the other.

As they proceeded their difficulties appeared to grow greater and greater.

They journeyed on among the trees for several hours without making any discovery, and without meeting with any incident deserving of special record.

They penetrated some distance into the forest.

But still they seemed no nearer the achievement of their object than before.

Jack Sheppard was quite downcast.

Just about sunset he flung himself down upon the ground, and said:

"Let us rest a little, Blueskin, for I am so fatigued that I cannot possibly go any further; besides, I have no heart to proceed. We may continue wandering about in this manner for ever and ever."

"Cheer up, Jack!" said Blueskin, as he lay down on the turf by his comrade's side. "I am quite as fatigued as yourself, and am heartily glad of a brief rest."

"But what is to be done?" said Jack, dejectedly.

"We can do nothing but continue our search in the same way as we have begun it."

"Alas!"

"The enterprise before us is a difficult one, Jack; but we must be of good heart, and hope for the best; chance alone can befriend us. I trust that ere long we shall discover something which will serve as a clue."

There was but slight consolation to be derived from this, and Jack Sheppard turned away his head in silence.

Blueskin was silent too; he was wondering what would be the best thing that could be done.

The sun went down, and darkness began rapidly to creep over the forest.

Still our friends remained lying motionless upon the ground, nor did they rise till the moon's rays lighted up the scene.

"Come, Jack," said Blueskin, "arouse yourself—we will continue our search! First of all, we must manage to obtain some refreshment; if we do not we shall soon find our strength fail, and then we shall be badly off indeed!"

"I am sick and faint for want of food," said Jack; "but where are we to obtain anything to eat?"

"Here readily enough;—there are plenty of birds on the trees, and plenty of dry sticks lying about, so that we can quickly have a fire."

"Set about it, then, Blueskin; for my own part, I feel too weary to assist you."

"Nay, nay—I can't consent to that! Rouse yourself! When you are occupied in doing something you will be better. Take my advice,—action is the best thing for you. I will catch a bird, and you can make a fire."

Jack Sheppard consented.

Blueskin primed his pistols, and went to a little distance.

He fired twice, and soon afterwards returned, bringing with him a couple of large birds covered with black feathers.

"I don't know what birds these are, Jack, nor what they are like, but I should fancy they are good to eat."

Jack Sheppard soon made a fire by the aid of some gunpowder and his pistols.

He placed some dry leaves upon the ground, sprinkled gunpowder over them, then put more leaves, and then dry twigs.

A spark from the flint of his pistol quickly set the whole in a blaze.

Their meal was a primitive one, but nevertheless they enjoyed it amazingly, although their hearts were so heavy.

Blueskin was very sad himself; but, perceiving how low-spirited his comrade was, he concealed his feelings, and endeavoured to cheer him up.

He was only partially successful.

When they had finished their meal, Blueskin said:

"Now, Jack, I will be guided entirely by you in this matter. Do you think it will be better for us to remain here during the night, and commence our search at daylight to-morrow morning, or do you think we had better set about it now?"

"Which do you think would be the best?"

"Nay, I leave the choice to you."

"Then I fancy we shall not stand so good a chance of finding out anything if we travel by night, as we should if we travelled by day. We must have rest, and night is the proper time to take it."

"I quite agree with you," said Blueskin; "and that is the course which I should have adopted myself, only I feared that if I made the proposition you would accuse me of want of zeal."

"You did me an injustice, then. Let us remain where we are, and, if possible, obtain a good night's sleep. In the morning we shall awake rested and refreshed, and shall feel equal to the day's work before us."

"I hope we shall," said Blueskin. "We shall be able to make ourselves comfortable here, no doubt. It will be best to gather together as many dry sticks as we can find, and make a large fire with them; we can then lie down by the side of it and pass the night in safety."

This was agreed to.

All three occupied themselves in collecting fuel for the fire, which they placed in a great heap close at hand.

They piled plenty on the fire—then threw themselves down beside it.

They conversed together for several moments, but at last they all fell asleep.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXIX.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ARE AROUSED FROM THEIR SLUMBERS IN A STARTLING MANNER.

BLUESKIN and Jack Sheppard had travelled from Amsterdam without taking much rest upon the road, and from the time of their arrival at the ruined cottage until they laid down beside the fire in the forest, they had gone through no ordinary amount of fatigue.

Consequently, when they closed their eyes, their slumber was profound.

In all probability it would have continued for many hours had not both been startled by a loud and terrible cry.

Heavy as their slumber was, it awoke them instantly.

Under the impulse of the moment they sprang up, but they could not tell what they had heard or what it was that awoke them, or whether it was the effect of some dream.

The fact was, their brains were still clouded by sleep.

Another piercing cry, of a character similar to the first, completely restored them to the use of their faculties.

The fire had gone low, and gave out but little light.

Blueskin, however, on the first impulse of alarm had drawn his sword, and with this he turned the faggots over, and a bright blaze instantly sprang up.

A cry of horror then pealed at the same moment from his lips and those of Jack Sheppard.

Bending over the deformed boy, who had laid himself down to sleep, close to our friends was some huge object, but of what kind they could not at the first glance make out.

Jack Sheppard was the first to recognise it, and in accents of the greatest alarm he cried:

"It is a bear!"

He was right,—a bear, and one, too, of the largest and most ferocious species.

The fire now blazed fiercely, and gave forth a vivid light, fully revealing the form of the monstrous animal.

Its eyes were red with anger, and had a hungry look, while the lips were drawn back, thus showing the glittering teeth.

The deformed boy was quite overcome by the horror of his position, and had fainted.

One of the bear's paws rested on his breast.

Our friends had started up only just in time.

A minute later, and they would have had no chance of saving the boy's life.

As it was, it seemed very doubtful whether they would be able to do so.

The bear seemed to regard Blueskin and Jack with mingled defiance and apprehension.

The occurrence was altogether of such a startling and unexpected nature, that at first our friends stood perfectly still, not knowing what to do.

Neither had seen a bear before, and consequently were ignorant of the animal's exact powers of mischief, and of the easiest means of killing it.

Its huge size and fierce appearance made them think that an attack would be attended with great danger.

While making these reflections, both felt that it would be necessary to put an end to this hesitation.

Blueskin was the first to recover himself.

As we have said, he had his drawn sword in his hand, and brandishing this he suddenly rushed forward.

His intention of course was to attack the bear with it.

Jack Sheppard saw what he was about to do, and, springing forward, seized his comrade by the arm and drew him back.

"Be careful!" he said—"be careful! Let us consider what would be the best mode of attacking the animal, and decide upon that which will rescue the boy with the least amount of danger to ourselves."

"And while we are doing that," said Blueskin, "struggling to release himself, the poor lad will doubtless fall a victim."

"No, no!—look steadily at the bear,—see how it is watching us;—it will not turn away to attack the boy for fear we should take advantage of the moment."

Blueskin saw that Jack was right.

"What shall we do?" he said. "How can we make an attack?"

"Let us shoot it."



[JONATHAN WILD IS BROUGHT A PRISONER INTO THE VESTIBULE OF NEWGATE.]

"But the death-blow must be inflicted at once. If you wound it, it will become quite ungovernable, and will rush upon us regardless of what injuries we may inflict." "Let us both take our pistols and shoot it; I am sure that would be better than attacking it with a sword."

This was agreed to. Blueskin sheathed his sword and drew a couple of pistols from his belt.

Jack Sheppard did the same, and pointed them full at the bear's head.

They were only a few paces off, and had no doubt that their aim would be successful.

It would almost seem as though the bear was conscious that it was menaced by no ordinary peril, for it appeared half inclined to beat a retreat.

Blueskin fired both his pistols in rapid succession.

He hit the bear both times, once in the neck and once in the shoulder.

An angry roaring growl was the result, and Blueskin stepped back, for he fancied the bear was about to rush upon him.

No. 101.—BLUESKIN.

It was just at this moment that Jack fired.

But excitement rendered his aim unsteady.

One bullet struck the bear in the paw which rested on the deformed boy's breast, and the other went crashing among the trees.

By this time Blueskin had drawn two more pistols.

He fired, and both shots took effect in or near the animal's head.

With an angry snarl it left the body of the boy and came towards our friends with a shuffling, ungainly motion, which seemed clumsy and slow, but which was in reality much more rapid than they could have believed possible.

Jack Sheppard saw the bear coming, and hastily fired one pistol.

Fortunately he had the presence of mind to reserve the other.

Upon receiving this last wound, the bear gave an impetuous dash forward, and before Jack could get out of the way he found himself hurled with great violence to the earth.

The fall was not violent enough to deprive him of his senses, and looking up he saw the bear's head within a few inches of his face.

A sickly feeling of horror came over him, and he almost gave himself up for lost.

He was paralysed.

He held the undischarged pistol in his right hand, and although he was aware of it, yet he had not the power to raise his arm and point its muzzle towards his adversary.

Blueskin uttered a shout when he saw the bear rush forward.

He carried only four pistols, and these were all discharged.

There was no time to load, and so he once more drew his sword.

Two steps took him to where the bear was, and raising his sword, he brought it down with tremendous violence upon the brute's neck; at the very same instant, Jack Sheppard, who had recovered from the horror caused by his position, raised his pistol.

He was able to put the muzzle within an inch of the brute's throat.

He pulled the trigger, and a tremendous report followed.

Blueskin raised his sword and brought it down for a second time upon the brute's neck.

This was the last stroke.

The huge animal dropped suddenly, and lay perfectly still, as though entirely bereft of life.

It fell, too, exactly upon the body of Jack Sheppard, who was in imminent danger of being suffocated.

Perceiving that the bear was dead, Blueskin hastened to extricate his friend from his uncomfortable situation.

This task proved almost beyond his power, and when at last he succeeded in rolling the bear over, he found that Jack was unconscious.

He did not believe, however, that he was seriously hurt, and so this gave him small concern.

Raising him in his arms, he hurried off towards a stream which he had noticed while looking for the birds.

He laid Jack in the shallow brook, and let the water roll over him from head to foot.

The treatment was somewhat rough, but it was effectual. The sudden chill restored Jack Sheppard to the full possession of his senses.

Blueskin assisted him to his feet, and then Jack shook the water from his clothing.

"Are you hurt?"

Jack did not reply, but drew two or three long breaths, and then worked all his limbs about, to ascertain whether he had received any injury.

"No," he at length gasped out, "it is all right."

"I am glad to hear that."

"It was a sharp touch, but it doesn't matter now. The bear is dead, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"I thought that last bullet would do the business—it must have gone right up into his brain; but how about the boy?"

"I had forgotten him," said Blueskin, with a start; "but never mind; stay where you are a moment, and I will fetch him."

"I don't think he is hurt."

"Nor I, though he has very likely fainted."

With these words on his lips, Blueskin hastened back to the fire.

He found the lad in a deep swoon.

Lifting him up, he carried him to the stream, and used just the same means to restore him to life as he had used to restore Jack Sheppard.

"That is rough treatment," said the latter.

"But very effectual."

As he uttered the words, the deformed boy shuddered and looked up.

His face wore an expression of great alarm.

Doubtless he expected to see the bear still bending over him.

"It is all right," cried Blueskin quickly; "you are safe and unhurt—the bear is dead."

This intelligence was received with manifest pleasure, but the poor lad's teeth chattered together, and he looked a very dismal object with the water streaming from all parts of his clothing, for he had not shaken off the moisture as Jack Sheppard had done.

He was told to do so, and then Blueskin said:

"Come on; let us go back to the fire—I will soon throw on some more wood, and your clothes will be dry in a little while."

There was something cheerful in the prospect of a fire, and they followed Blueskin with great willingness.

Their first care, however, was to ascertain whether the bear was really dead.

Little more than a glance was necessary to satisfy them upon this point.

The ferocious brute had ceased to breathe.

"During the remainder of the night," said Blueskin, "we will watch and watch by turns; it will never do for us all to go to sleep at the same time again."

"We ought not to have done so at first."

"We ought not; but I am glad matters are no worse. Help me to throw some wood on the fire, and then you will soon be all right."

This was done, and in a few minutes, as the wood was dry, they had quite a bonfire.

The heat quickly dried their apparel.

"Now," said Blueskin, "if you will lie down both of you and go to sleep, I will keep watch; at the end of a couple of hours or so I will awake one of you, who must take my place while I lie down to sleep."

This was at once consented to, for after their sudden immersion the heat of the fire made Jack and the boy excessively sleepy.

They had scarcely stretched themselves at full length before they fell into a sound slumber.

CHAPTER CCCCXXX.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ARE ATTACKED BY WOLVES.

BLUESKIN seated himself at a little distance from the fire and close to his companions.

Ere long, however, he discovered that the deep silence of the place as well as the warmth of the fire was drawing him off to sleep.

This is not to be wondered at, for he was greatly fatigued, and the sleep he had had was too brief to recuperate his strength.

As soon as he felt this sleepy feeling creeping over him, he rose to his feet.

It cost him an effort to do so, but he was convinced of the danger that would result from all three sleeping at the same time.

"I will walk up and down," he said, half aloud. "That will be the best means of keeping awake."

He did so, but even then felt sleepy—marching up and down grew wearisome.

From time to time he threw more wood on the fire.

On one occasion when he advanced to do this he happened to look across the open clearing, and then he saw something which greatly astonished him.

He threw the wood on the top of the fire, and this had for a moment or two the effect of almost extinguishing the flames, so that he was able to see much better.

Straight before him in the darkness he could see two small glittering objects close together.

What they were he could not for the life of him make out; but looking more closely, he saw two more close to the first, and then two more, until, as he continued to gaze, they grew innumerable.

He stood perfectly still for several minutes gazing at this phenomenon, and endeavouring to make out what it was.

The faintly-glittering objects were different to anything he had ever seen before, and the longer he gazed the more numerous did they become.

Then the fire blazed up again with full force, and he was no longer able to see them.

As may be expected, his curiosity was greatly raised.

The sleepy sensation which had come over him was dispelled as if by magic.

It was some time before he could quite make up his mind what he should do.

He had already taken the precaution to re-load his pistols, and he placed them in his belt in such a manner that they would be handy to his grasp.

Then, drawing his sword, he, after a brief period of hesitation, walked round to the other side of the fire.

Standing with his back to the flames, he once more looked across the open space.

There were the glittering objects as before, only they looked very much brighter, as though the light from the fire was reflected upon them.

He soon found that they were ranged round him in an irregular semi-circle.

And though he had discovered this he found himself unable to come to any conclusion.

He was as mystified and bewildered as when he first caught sight of them.

Instead of pacing up and down on one side of the fire, as he had hitherto done, he walked round and round it.

On one occasion he paused, and as it happened, not far from the spot where the body of the bear lay.

He looked upon it, for, as the fire was burning brightly, he could see with great distinctness.

Then he looked straight across the open space, and was astonished to find that the glittering objects he could see all around him were much closer together, and more numerous in this spot than in any other.

While meditating upon this occurrence, and while his brain was filled with a thousand wild ideas, he was startled by hearing a loud howl.

It was almost such a sound as a dog would have made, and the cry was quickly repeated, only it seemed to come from the throats of thousands.

Blueskin staggered back in alarm, until warned by the heat of the fire that he could not retreat any farther.

"It is wolves," he said—"wolves! I have heard of them often! It is their eyes that I can see all around me! They have been attracted to the spot by the dead body of the bear, but they are frightened to come too near to the fire."

Blueskin had hit upon the true solution of the whole affair.

The small glittering objects which had so puzzled him were indeed the eyes of wolves, who had scented from afar the blood which had flowed from the bear.

They had continued silent, gazing at the fire and frightened to advance nearer, until one of their number had uttered the howl that had so startled Blueskin.

That seemed the signal for the rest.

Without exception, they all commenced a hideous howling, which did not cease for a single moment.

The sound grew louder and louder.

It penetrated the ears of the sleepers, and both started up in the utmost terror.

Blueskin got round to the other side of the fire where his comrades were.

"What is it?" asked Jack Sheppard, with difficulty making his voice heard above the howling chorus.

In a few words Blueskin explained.

"What is to be done?" he asked.

"Nothing but remain where we are," said Blueskin.

"We are safer here than we possibly could be elsewhere."

"How so?"

"Because of the fire. We have only to keep it well piled up, and we are secure. The wolves will be frightened to approach it."

"Then, if that is all," said Jack, "we will soon have a good fire."

"Heap on plenty of wood," continued Blueskin. "In the morning they will all disappear."

The howling of the wolves was by this time truly terrific; they seemed to have assembled in thousands.

In spite of the assurance which Blueskin had given of their safety, Jack Sheppard and the boy were much terrified by the awful sounds, and they glanced apprehensively in the direction which they came.

Wood was piled upon the fire in tremendous quantities. Blueskin ventured round to the other side.

He quickly returned, and as soon as his companions saw him, they perceived that the expression of his countenance had changed.

"What is the matter?" they asked. "What is amiss?"

"Nothing—nothing! I may be mistaken; but still, when I looked out, I fancied that the wolves were closer than before."

This was alarming intelligence, and there was little doubt that it was true, for in such a matter Blueskin would not be likely to let his fears lead him astray when he had spoken so confidently about the power of the fire to keep them away.

"What is to be done?" asked Jack Sheppard.

"I am at a loss to tell you. I have always heard that the safest and best protection against wild animals is a fire. This one has certainly kept them off to some extent, but they appear to me to be gradually drawing nearer and nearer."

"Are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"Come with me, and you can see for yourself. We have to but walk round to the other side of the fire."

Jack Sheppard accompanied Blueskin as requested, and then, after gazing earnestly for a few moments, he said:

"I am sure they are nearer!"

"It is the dead body of the bear which attracts them," said Blueskin.

"Then, what will it matter if they come forward. They can devour it, and welcome, so long as they let us alone."

"That is just it," said Blueskin—"they won't let us alone!"

"Why not? Will not the carcass of the bear satisfy them?"

"No. Just estimate, if you can, the number of wolves. Probably there are more than we can see; but whether or not, there are enough to devour every morsel in a trice."

"And what then?"

"Why, it will but be a mouthful apiece or so to them all round, and will serve to give them an appetite. They will then come towards us, and we shall find it utterly impossible to contend against such a multitude."

Jack Sheppard was silent, but he fixed his eyes constantly in the direction of the wolves.

It was clear enough that they were coming nearer, and, as they advanced, they continued to utter the most fearful yells.

The position of our two friends was rapidly becoming critical.

They taxed their brains to the utmost, in the endeavour to hit upon some plan by which they might keep the wolves at a distance.

"If we can only keep them off till daybreak," said Blueskin, "all will be well; they will retire then, never fear; they are cowardly creatures at the best!"

"But how are we to keep them off till then?"

"I wish I could tell you. At present, it appears to me we can do nothing more than pile plenty of wood upon the fire, so that it shall give out as much light and heat as possible."

All three set about this task, and in a little while the fire crackled and gave out as much heat as a furnace.

The unearthly howls still continued, and the wolves, stimulated by hunger, overcame by degrees the terror which the fire occasioned them, and crept gradually nearer and nearer.

Blueskin looked up to the sky in the hope of being able to discover some traces of the dawn.

But all was dark.

The moon had sunk, and the whole face of the heavens was covered with dense leaden-coloured clouds.

Jack Sheppard looked anxiously from time to time into Blueskin's countenance, and noticed what a terrible look of fatigue it wore.

At last he said:

"The wolves do not appear to be very aggressive yet, Blueskin. Lie down and rest yourself. Try and get a few minutes' sleep—I am sure you are in great need of it."

"I am—I am."

"I knew that, but whether you will be able to sleep or not with this horrible howling ringing in your ears is more than I can tell. Let me, however, entreat you to make the attempt."

"And you will keep watch?"

"Yes, most faithfully. The brief rest I have already had has refreshed me wonderfully."

"And you will call me the moment any danger threatens?"

"Yes."

"Then I will lie down, for, to tell the truth, I feel more worn out than I have done for many a long day."

"I don't wonder at it. It is a long time since you had any proper rest. It is now more than ever necessary that

you should sleep, for the probability is, that we shall have a long and harassing day to-morrow."

"I shall not care for that if I can sleep now, but I am afraid the effort will be a vain one."

While speaking these words, Blueskin threw himself down upon the turf near the fire, and so complete was his exhaustion, that, contrary to his anticipation, the howling of the wolves produced no effect upon him, and in a very little while he was sound asleep.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD COMMENCE THEIR SEARCH FOR EDGWORTH BESS.

JACK SHEPPARD continued to watch.

He walked frequently round and round the fire, and looked in the direction where the largest number of wolves had assembled.

After gazing upon them repeatedly, he at last concluded that they had become stationary.

He was almost afraid to believe in such good tidings, but at last he felt certain that the wolves had ceased to advance.

Such was the case.

The hungry creatures had approached to within a certain distance of the fire, and there they remained, terrified to come nearer, for the fire was much fiercer now than it had yet been.

The satisfaction to be derived from this fact was, however, but very slight; they would remain there for a certain time, until, growing accustomed to the flames, and impelled by their hunger, they would creep nearer and nearer to the bear's carcass.

Jack Sheppard did not think of this, but imagined that the wolves had got as near the fire as they dared, and would not venture to approach any closer.

Finding the alarm had to some extent subsided, the poor deformed boy laid himself down near Blueskin, while Jack Sheppard was left alone.

The brief slumber which he had already had, had proved sufficient to rest him, for his disposition was too restless and excitable to demand much sleep.

He had no other companion save his thoughts, and these were sad enough.

He did indeed seem to be the sport of a malignant destiny.

After passing through such a horrible ordeal as he had recently done, he had come over to Amsterdam under the full anticipation that he should once more see Edgworth Bess.

He was very doubtful as to the manner in which she would receive him, for since they had parted in hastiness and anger, they had had no opportunity either for explanation or reconciliation.

He had arrived in time to learn that she had been spirited away by German banditti. Their object for this act and the poor girl's fate were like inscrutable.

He sighed heavily and his throat ached.

The only consolation and relief that he was able to find was by passing rapidly up and down. While in motion his thoughts did not seem to chafe him so badly.

A prolonged yell from the wolves at last aroused him, and he found that while giving way to his sad reflections he had neglected the important duty of piling fuel upon the fire.

Perceiving the omission, he hastened to repair it.

But the quantity of wood he threw on at once had, for a moment or two, the effect of dulling the flames considerably.

The wolves, whose eyes had been fixed ceaselessly and untiringly upon the fire, perceiving this sudden diminution in its brilliancy, felt emboldened to advance.

The foremost gave a few bounds forward and reached the prize.

The example of one was sufficient.

The rush of footsteps as they hastened forward came clear enough to Jack Sheppard's ears, and, starting back, he uttered a cry of alarm.

Blueskin heard the cry, and awoke.

He started immediately to his feet and put himself in an attitude of defence, for he imagined that the wolves were already upon them.

The flames now shot up from the fire with great sud-

denness and fierceness, revealing clearly every nook and corner of the open space.

Fighting, tearing, scrambling, howling, the wolves had piled themselves up in one dense mass over the body of the bear.

When the flames burst forth in the manner we have described there was a momentary silence.

All paused, and ceased what they were about.

They were half inclined to turn and fly, and had one set the example, the others would doubtless have followed without exception.

Their appetite was whetted, however, by the few mouthfuls they had already been able to obtain, and so they remained still.

Then, finding that the fire grew no brighter and did them no injury, they recommenced their battle for the food.

Standing near the fire in such a position that they could command a view of that portion of the open space, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard stood watching the movements of the wolves.

Their numbers were incredible, and could they have all commenced their repast upon the bear, every fragment of the flesh would quickly have disappeared.

Anxiously our friends looked up to the sky, but all was dark.

There was not the slightest token of the coming of the much-wished-for dawn.

The frantic shriekings and strugglings of the wolves continued without abatement, until at length every edible morsel of the bear was devoured.

Then came the moment of danger.

Jack Sheppard looked anxiously into his comrade's face.

"Let us retreat to the other side of the fire," said Blueskin. "It is possible that, after all, they may depart satisfied."

Blueskin said this, but he did not think it.

It was, however, quite clear that the best and most prudent course was to place the fire between them and the rapacious animals.

The yelling and fighting which had taken place over the bear's carcass was followed by a remarkable, and, as our friends felt, ominous silence.

In vain they listened for the retreating footsteps of the wolves.

No such sounds came upon their ears, and so they were driven to the conclusion that they had all remained stationary.

Believing that no harm could result from such a proceeding, Blueskin once more ventured to pass round the fire, in order to reconnoitre the enemy.

His worst fears were realised when he saw the whole troop in a dense pack, with their heads all turned towards the fire, and their gleaming eyeballs fixed upon it.

He returned to Jack and told him what he had seen.

Most fervently did they wish for the coming of the new day.

But the clouds looked as black as ever.

"Morning cannot be far off," said Blueskin, "and I fully believe that the darkest hour is the one before the dawn."

"I hope this is the hour."

"And so do I, for after a time, in all probability, the wolves will gather courage and advance. If such a thing happens, we shall find ourselves quite unable to cope with such an enemy."

A silence followed these words.

Jack Sheppard was wondering where Edgworth Bess was at that moment, and whether she was menaced by any imminent peril.

Then the wolves broke forth into a dismal howl again, making the whole forest resound with their hideous yells.

"That is just the way they behaved before," said Blueskin. "They waited for a time in silence watching the fire, and then commenced to yell. I suppose in a little while they will get their courage up."

"Let us look at them once more," said Jack Sheppard. "I am sure we cannot do wrong in keeping an eye upon their movements."

"You are right. Come with me."

Creeping stealthily round the fire, in order, if possible, to escape the notice of the wolves, they looked out.

The immense pack had crept much nearer.

Evidently they were overcoming their dislike or dread of the fire, and were hungering to attack the three human beings they knew full well were near it.

Beyond them could be seen the skeleton of the bear.

The bones were quite stripped, and every one looked white and glistening in the fire-light.

Although the weight of this animal must have been enormous, and although they had devoured every fragment, including even the skin, yet the wolves appeared as ravenous as ever.

They grew more and more daring, and they had most certainly got hold of the idea that the fire would not harm them.

Closer and closer they came, even while our friends looked upon them.

They were already very, very close, and it was perfectly easy for our friends to distinguish the whole of their dark forms.

Suddenly, Blueskin was struck with a fresh thought.

Without saying a word, he turned round and drew a blazing fragment of wood from the fire.

It was a portion of a bough of a tree, and, whirling it round his head, he flung it with full force into the air.

It fell where the wolves were thickest, and a terrific howl was the result, succeeded by a violent scramble as all endeavoured to rush away.

Perceiving the advantage that had been thus gained, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard continued to throw the fragments of burning wood, until they forced the wolves to retreat across the open space and take refuge among the trees.

They then appeared to shrink gradually away, and in a few moments not one was to be seen.

The two friends congratulated each other most warmly upon the success of this scheme.

"I think their fright will endure for some time," said Blueskin; "ten to one if we are troubled with them again!"

"I wish dawn would come."

"So do I as heartily as you do, for I am thoroughly tired of the adventures of to-night."

"As we have been so lucky as to drive off the wolves, I think our wisest plan will be to obtain as much rest and sleep as we can,—to-morrow we shall require to call forth all our energies."

"We shall indeed!"

Just at this moment the deformed boy, who had remained on the other side of the fire, uttered a loud shout, and they hastened to find out what had happened.

There was no necessity to question the boy, for the first thing they saw was the wolves.

It was another pack, or else the same one that they had driven back who had made a detour and reached the other side of the fire.

Without a moment's hesitation, both our friends set to work to pelt them with the firebrands.

The rapacious animals retreated, but this time not so quickly as before, and with fewer signs of terror.

"I am afraid we shall have much trouble with them yet," said Blueskin; "they seem very resolute."

"We'll throw on more fuel," said Jack Sheppard, "and make up as large a fire as we can."

"Yes, do so; but I think it would be a good plan to make up another fire not far from this one; we could then place ourselves between the two, and, ten to one, should be in perfect safety!"

"It is worth trying, at any rate," said Jack Sheppard, "and will give us but little trouble."

They set to work to carry out this idea with all possible alacrity, and in a few moments they had another fire lighted, which promised in a little while to be as large and as fierce as the first.

The smoke and flames effectually prevented them from catching sight of the wolves, but they could hear their horrible howls clearly and distinctly above the roaring and crackling of the fires.

Our friends had to place themselves exactly half-way between the two fires, and at one time the heat was so excessive that they feared they should be compelled to abandon their place of refuge.

They were scorched a little; but, by stirring the blazing embers with their swords, they presently succeeded in remedying this evil.

The only demonstration they received from the wolves

was an incessant howling, which probably betokened the extent of their disappointment.

At last, to their relief, morning came.

As the sky grew lighter and lighter, so did the howls of the wolves grow fainter and fainter, until eventually they died completely away.

Jack Sheppard was now impatient that the search for Edgeworth Bess should be commenced, and it was with some difficulty that Blueskin persuaded him that it would be best to remain there for a little while longer, and obtain more rest as well as a substantial meal.

Ultimately, this was agreed to.

Blueskin shot some more birds, which they cooked in the same primitive fashion as they had done overnight; and, having finished their repast, they laid down to obtain an hour or two's slumber.

Just as the sun rose above the tree-tops, Jack Sheppard awoke.

He aroused his companion, and then, without further delay, they set about their search in good earnest.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS HAVE SOME TROUBLE AND DANGER IN CONVEYING JONATHAN WILD TO NEWGATE.

THE order of our story now brings us back to Jonathan Wild.

He certainly deserves some attention, for when we last saw him his situation was one of extreme peril.

It will be remembered that after his return from the bank he had entered the stable-yard, and had unexpectedly found himself surrounded by a large body of police officers.

Although the police officers were at least twenty in number, he made a most frantic and desperate resistance.

It, however, availed him nothing; all he got for his pains was some additional hard blows.

In the end, he found himself securely a prisoner.

Each one of the officers seemed to have hold of him in some way or other.

As a last effort, he tried to prevent the handcuffs from being slipped over his wrists.

But in this, as in the rest, he failed.

Long practice had taught the officer much dexterity, and, watching his opportunity, he slipped the handcuffs on in an instant.

"Here you are, Jonathan Wild, at last," he said; "and a fine game you have led us altogether! You might just as well have given in at first. You would have saved both us and yourself a great deal of trouble."

Jonathan Wild replied to this speech by uttering the most fearful curses that could be imagined.

The police officer himself was in the habit of "letting out," as he called it, now and then, but when he heard the blasphemous imprecations which came from the thief-taker's lips he turned pale, and, raising his voice a little higher than Wild's, he said:

"Come, come, Mr. Wild, leave that off! I am not very particular about swearing myself, but when I hear you go on like that, it gives me an awful turn!"

Jonathan Wild continued to shriek out his impotent curses without heeding him.

Left to himself, he soon exhausted himself at this exercise, and became comparatively calm; but when he ceased it was not because he had reached the end of his vocabulary, but because his throat was hoarse and cracked, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, so that to speak louder than a whisper became impossible.

He licked his parched lips nervously, and gazed angrily into the officer's countenance.

"I am heartily glad you have done, Mr. Wild," said the one in command, "and I hope that will last you till I get you safe inside Newgate. When you are in a stone cell by yourself, you may curse away as much as you like!"

Jonathan Wild's eyes were frenzied with rage.

He struggled even now to free himself from his bonds, and if he could have done so, there is no doubt he would have taken the very first moment to inflict some serious injury upon his foes.

He even felt that while he did so it would be some satisfaction to him—that he should go to the prison all the

more willingly if he could inflict some deadly wounds upon one or more of them.

This, however, was more than he could accomplish.

"Now, Mr. Wild," said the chief officer, "are you willing to listen to reason? We have got you, and I can tell you that we mean to keep you! Mind that! It just remains for yourself to decide whether you will be dragged through the streets to Newgate with all the rufians in London at your heels, or whether you will behave peaceably, and go in a hackney-coach."

The thief-taker paused a moment, and then spoke.

"Do you know who I am?" he said.

"Of course! Jonathan Wild."

"I am; and a police constable! Tell me upon what charge you arrest me!"

"You know all about that," said the chief officer. "I have got a warrant for your apprehension in my pocket, so that is all right."

"Let me see it."

"Not if I know it!" said the officer, with a wink.

"Then I refuse to accompany you."

"You can refuse what you like, but you will find you will have to go! I will take all the responsibility, and when you get to Newgate, I will hand the warrant to the Governor, when you will have the opportunity of seeing that it is all right."

Wild broke out into curses again.

"Stop, stop—that does no good! Just say, will you be hauled through the streets by main force, or will you get into a hackney-coach, and ride quietly to Newgate?"

Jonathan Wild glared about him.

He could not conceal from himself the fact that it would be easy enough for so many men to drag him along by sheer force.

A crowd would quickly be collected, which would surround them.

Already the gateway leading into the stable-yard was blocked up by a gaping multitude, who were with difficulty kept back.

Curiosity was on every face, for as yet they did not know that it was Jonathan Wild who had been made prisoner.

In the first place, they had scarcely caught a glimpse of him, and had failed to recognise the thief-taker in his Quaker's disguise.

From former experience Jonathan Wild knew well that he was by no means a favourite with the populace.

On a recent occasion he had had good proof of it, and he felt that he would have everything to dread from the violence of the mob, should he suffer himself to be dragged through the streets in the manner the officer had mentioned.

Yet, on the other hand, he could not help fancying that while he stood on foot among his foes, he stood a much better chance of making his escape than he possibly could do if he was cooped up in a hackney-coach.

The chief officer saw that his prisoner was considering, and remained quiet, in the hope that Wild would decide upon giving in quietly.

The officer was quite willing to be saved the trouble of hauling him through the streets.

"Come, Mr. Wild," he said at last, "have you made up your mind? I can't stop here all day, you know; my strict orders were that as soon as I captured you I was to take you direct to Newgate, and I have a warrant to that effect in my pocket at this moment."

Jonathan did not speak.

"Come now, which will you do?" repeated the officer.

"Do!" roared Wild, suddenly; "you can do your worst! I defy you all! Do your worst!"

"Very good! Since you will have it so, I can't help it. Bring him along, my lads; there is no need to be over-particular with him, and the sooner we get to Newgate the better! You need not be afraid of treating him rather roughly—he is done for; the charge against him is so clear and complete that, with all his cleverness, he will not be able to get off, and will never again be in a position to do harm to any of you."

Jonathan Wild bent furious and angry glances on the officer when he spoke, but that was all that lay in his power to do.

Among the police, there was not one who had not some grudge or other against the great thief-taker, though,

hitherto, circumstances had always prevented them from showing it.

Now, however, the case was quite altered, and after such a speech as they had uttered, they one and all, in the roughest possible manner, set about the task of dragging Wild along.

Despite his furious struggles the street was reached.

A dense crowd had already collected, and when they saw the officers emerge, some one who caught sight of the prisoner, yelled out:

"Why, that is Jonathan Wild!"

The pronunciation of this much-dreaded and much-execrated name produced an almost magical effect upon the assemblage. Shouts and cries of every description were given utterance to, and although he had anticipated this scene, and had tried to school himself into firmness, yet Jonathan Wild trembled and quailed.

"Stone him!—shoot him!—smash him!—hang him up to the next lamp post!—down with Jonathan Wild!—death to him!—death to the villain!"

These and a thousand other horrible cries rose above the din of conflicting sounds, and reached the ear of the thief-taker with great distinctness.

Every instant the multitude increased in numbers and also in violence.

The police officer and his men looked apprehensively around them; they found they were getting hemmed in and were unable to proceed.

None had any affection for the prisoner, but it was their duty to defend him, and take him in safety to Newgate, and so they did so.

It was doubtful, however, whether they would be successful in keeping off the attack of so many people.

Stones and other missiles began to fall among them, and from shouts and threats it was clear that the people would quickly proceed to actual deeds of violence.

Jonathan tried hard to retain his firmness, and in the effort bit his lips till the blood flowed.

It was all in vain, however, he could not do so, and when some more than usually horrible cries assailed his ears he would tremble and shake like an aspen leaf.

Surely, never before had such a commotion been known in the City of London.

The streets were completely blocked up, windows were thrown open, and everyone appeared in a state of the greatest possible excitement, all eager and curious to obtain a glimpse of, and others to inflict some injury upon, the notorious thief-taker.

Jonathan ceased to struggle. Probably at this moment he regretted that he had not taken the officer's advice, and entered a hackney-carriage.

Had he done so he would have been saved the present terrible scene, for his heart failed him at every step he took.

As for escape, there was no chance or hope for such a thing, and the more he reflected and the further he went the more did he regret that he had made the choice he had.

The police officers regretted it too, for they looked hot and anxious.

They knew the desperate character of their prisoner, and had to care for his safety, while at the same time they had to protect themselves and him from the mob.

At last, upon reaching the bottom of Cornhill, they were brought to a complete stop.

It was no longer possible for them to advance a single step, and the pressure of the mob continually increased.

At this point many thoroughfares converged into one focus, so that it is no matter for wonder that the crowd should augment so rapidly as it did.

Had anyone been placed at a sufficient elevation to command a view of the whole of this strange spectacle they would have beheld an ocean of human beings surging wildly and madly to and fro, struggling desperately with each other like wild beasts, yet all pressing gradually to one point.

That one point was the spot where Jonathan Wild stood surrounded by the police officers.

Stronger and stronger became the pressure upon them. And they made strenuous efforts to preserve a little open space, but failed.

With admirable presence of mind, the one in command ordered his men to form into a solid square, with their prisoner and himself in the centre.

This they did, and, drawing their cutlasses, placed them against their breasts, and so endeavoured to keep off the excited beings who surrounded them on all sides.

CHAPTER CXCXXXIII.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS HIMSELF THE INMATE OF A NEWGATE CELL.

For a moment or two this manoeuvre proved successful.

The people who were nearest, and who were pressing forward with the greatest eagerness, recoiled before the sharp points of the officers' cutlasses.

Having formed into a solid square, the police stood as firm as a rock, for the pressure of the people was resisted on all sides alike.

Those people whose bodies were exactly opposed to the officers' weapons shrunk back and endeavoured to remain stationary at a safe distance, while they continued their shouts and yells for vengeance upon the thief-taker.

Those persons, however, who formed the outer portion of the mob knew nothing about this clever little arrangement on the part of the officers, and also continued to press forward with ever-increasing strength.

In vain those in the centre endeavoured to remain stationary.

The pressure behind them was greater than they could withstand, and so they found themselves, unwillingly enough, forced on to the points of the cutlasses.

The officers grasped their weapons with both hands, and prepared to meet the shock.

Slowly, yet surely, the people were forced towards them.

They held back, but in a minute or so they felt the sharp steel penetrating their breasts.

Convinced that if they did not make a desperate and successful effort to stem the current they would be transfixed by the cutlasses, they recoiled with greater strength than before.

The intelligence that the officers had formed for themselves such a formidable barrier was quickly passed from mouth to mouth; and those who were nearest to the centre remained stationary, and resisted to the utmost the pressure from those on the outskirts of the crowd, who either did not or would not understand what was taking place.

The shouts, and groans, and screams, and yells that rose from the dense throng were positively fearful.

The chief police officer was much annoyed and vexed at this occurrence, and he was unable to see his way out of the difficulty.

At length, he desired his men to raise him as well as they could above their heads, in order that he might wave his hat, or give some other signal that he was in imminent need of assistance.

His men hoisted him on their shoulders willingly enough, for they were far from pleased with their position.

From this point of vantage the chief officer was able to command a view of the whole crowd, and he was astounded at its immensity.

He waved his hat in the air, and made many other gesticulations to express that he stood in need of help.

The populace responded to his actions with derisive cries.

The chief officer then, becoming somewhat calmer, looked slowly and carefully all around.

Presently a cry of satisfaction escaped his lips.

Coming from the direction of Cheapside, he caught sight of a troop of mounted soldiers.

"Let me down!" he said to his men who held him up—"let me down! Keep the people off for a few minutes, and all will be well—assistance is coming!"

The officer was glad enough to descend, for while he had occupied his lofty position he had been the mark for many missiles, and, although he had been struck by several, yet he escaped any serious injury.

In the meanwhile, Jonathan Wild—the cause of this tumult—had regained his calmness.

He no longer regretted the course he had taken, for he felt that, let things be how they might, his position could not possibly be made worse than it was.

He received the intelligence that assistance was coming with a grim smile.

The officer was perfectly correct.

As soon as the crowd collected in such prodigious numbers, intelligence was forwarded to the proper quarter, for it was feared, and with good reason, that a terrible riot would ensue, the result of which would be very difficult to estimate.

The military were called out, and, with that promptitude which distinguishes all military affairs, a troop had been mustered and led to the scene of action.

As soon as the soldiers arrived, the Lord Mayor appeared at one of the windows of the Mansion House, and, calling aloud to the people, commenced to read the Riot Act.

All the people, however, were so intent upon pushing forward, that they paid not the slightest attention to his words.

As soon as he had finished reading, the Mayor called upon the soldiers to disperse the crowd.

Under the command of their officer, the soldiers spurred their horses forward, and laid about them with the flat side of their swords.

The attack was soon productive of results.

The people began rapidly to disperse, and many in the distant portions of the crowd no sooner heard that the soldiers were out, and that the Riot Act had been read, than they took to their heels and departed.

It proved, however, to be a work of considerable time to disperse the whole mob, but at length this was done.

The soldiers then came up to the police officers who surrounded Jonathan Wild.

The chief of the police warmly expressed his thanks to the officer in charge of the soldiers for the effectual service he had rendered him, and requested him, in order to prevent the recurrence of this affair, that he would form a guard of escort for them and their prisoner as far as Newgate.

This was agreed to.

Jonathan Wild glared about him with undissembled rage.

He felt, now that the soldiers accompanied the officers, that he stood not the slightest chance of making his escape.

However he might object to such a course, he would be led to Newgate.

Becoming convinced of this, and feeling that he could do nothing, the thief-taker bent his head forward and walked slowly along.

"We have done a good service, Mr. Wild," said one of the officers. "If the people could have got at you they would have torn you limb from limb! By this time scarcely a fragment of you would have remained!"

Jonathan made no reply to this speech, but continued to walk on slowly as before.

The people who had formed the crowd only retreated a short distance, and quickly assembled again.

The presence of the soldiers overawed them, however, and they made no hostile demonstration, and walked on peacefully and quietly enough in the rear.

It was deemed advisable not to interfere with them.

In this manner the procession proceeded at a brisk walk.

The distance they had to go was not very great.

Crossing over the open space between the Royal Exchange and the Mansion House, they took their way along the Poultry and Cheapside until Newgate Street was reached.

Here they were compelled to come to a halt, for the thoroughfare was very narrow.

The pause was a brief one, and the whole party was quickly in procession again, for the officers were anxious to see their prisoner once safe inside Newgate.

On entering Newgate Street, Jonathan Wild raised his head and looked about him.

The officers noticed it, and placed themselves more upon their guard, for they fancied the movement portended something.

The thief-taker looked from side to side, as though in search of something.

It is just possible that, rendered desperate by his close proximity to Newgate, some daring schemes of escape were flitting through his brain.

If such was the case, he must have been unable to find one that seemed at all likely to succeed, for he did not struggle with his captors in the least.

Jonathan could not refrain from casting a glance down Warwick Lane.

His eyes rested for a brief space upon the quaint old archway, from the top of which he had had such a fearful fall.

The next instant the street was passed.

Another object now attracted his attention.

That was his house, or rather the ruins of it.

Only the shell remained, the interior having been completely burnt out.

The bare and blackened walls had a dismal appearance.

It was such a ruin as its master's fortunes.

The police officers all looked up at the remains of Wild's house, and then they turned their heads and looked into the countenance of the thief-taker, in order to observe what effect the sight had upon him.

Jonathan's face was inscrutable.

What thoughts might have been at that moment passing through his mind, the police officers had no means of knowing.

That his reflections were bitter ones we may feel quite sure.

He watched his house as long as he was able to do so, and, when at length the other buildings hid it from his view, he thought how quickly his own destruction had followed that of his house.

Round the corner, into the Old Bailey, the procession now passed.

The mob still orderly and peaceable; indeed, as they came nearer and nearer to the gloomy city prison, a kind of awe seemed to creep over them.

It was noticed that Jonathan Wild gave one swift glance at the old structure.

Then his eyes once more sought the ground, and he walked gloomily onwards.

The intelligence that Jonathan Wild had been captured and was being brought through the streets, had already reached Newgate.

A considerable body of police officers had placed themselves across the lower end of the thoroughfare, in order to keep off the crowd.

Had not this precaution been taken, it would have been difficult, nay, almost impossible, for the prisoner to have been led to the door of the vestibule.

As it was, the place was perfectly clear, with the exception of those constables who formed a kind of guard round the door itself, and would facilitate the entrance of the prisoner and his captors.

In spite of the calmness that he had so well assumed, Jonathan's cheeks blanched, and his heart shook.

The knowledge that he full well merited imprisonment and the death which is awarded to criminals of the deepest dye, was ever before his mind, and it seemed to crush him to the earth.

Curses and maledictions no longer issued from his lips.

Despair was taking hold of him, and he was fast sinking into a state of apathetic dejection.

At every step that he took bringing him nearer and nearer to the portals of the gloomy prison, this feeling increased.

In another moment the procession came to a halt, and looking up, Jonathan saw that he was standing at the foot of the little flight of stone steps that led up from the street to the strong iron-bound door opening into the vestibule or lobby of Newgate.

The chief police officer knocked loudly.

The summons was expected, and the man on the lock, after giving one hasty glance through the little wicket, flung the door wide open and allowed the party to enter.

For the first time in his life, Jonathan Wild found himself standing beneath the roof of Newgate a prisoner!

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIV.

MR. NOAKES IS MUCH DISCONCERTED BY THE ARRIVAL OF JONATHAN WILD AT NEWGATE.

WE may safely affirm that there was no person in Great Britain who felt so much uneasiness and apprehension on account of the steps that were taken against Jonathan Wild, than did Mr. Noakes, the Governor of Newgate.

As the reader is well aware, a compact of an infamous nature had for a length of time subsisted between him and the thief-taker.

He stood committed in many nefarious transactions which Wild had from time to time been guilty of, and not unreasonably he dreaded that Jonathan's downfall was but the forerunner of his own.

He foresaw in the future an immense amount of disagreeableness and trouble.

In his heart of hearts most fervently and devoutly did he wish that Jonathan Wild might succeed in making an escape from his foes.

At any rate, that he would defend himself to the last, and choose death rather than submission, or that some chance shot should rid him of existence.

Anything rather than that he should be brought a prisoner to Newgate.

That was an idea that had the effect of almost driving Mr. Noakes into madness.

In a greater state of suspense, then, than the thief-taker himself endured, the Governor awaited the result of the pursuit that was being made.

A gleam of joy came over his heart when he heard of Jonathan's first escape, and how he had succeeded in mounting a horse and galloping away, leaving no trace behind him.

Days passed by, as we know full well, without the officers having the least clue to guide them; and with each hour the Governor's spirits rose, for it induced the belief that Jonathan Wild had left the country.

The agitation and distress of mind which he suffered produced a great change in the personal appearance of the Governor, and the sheriffs and officials connected with the prison wondered what in the world it was that ailed him.

Of course Mr. Noakes never thought of satisfying anybody upon this point—his trouble was one that must be endured alone.

He experienced a sudden and alarming shock when he heard the news that Jonathan had again been seen, and at no great distance from London, and pursued for some distance.

True, there was some consolation to be derived from the fact that he had succeeded in escaping, but then the Governor felt a special uneasiness when he found that, instead of getting away, as he might have done, the thief-taker was still lingering near the metropolis.

He argued from that, that Wild did not intend to quit England, and his apprehensions grew greater and greater, for he saw a thousand evils in prospective.

When at last, on that eventful morning, he had been told that Jonathan Wild had been captured near Fenchurch Street, and that a strong body of officers were bringing him to Newgate, he gave a gasping sort of cry and sank into a chair.

For some time he showed no signs of life, and when at last he recovered and the intelligence was repeated to him, he refused to believe it.

He was in a state of the most abject fright; and then he received another shock when a messenger brought word that the prisoner had already entered Newgate Street.

With a view of satisfying himself as to the correctness of the report, Mr. Noakes ascended to the roof of the prison, from which, as he knew full well, a view of Newgate Street could be obtained.

Heavy leaden weights appeared to be fastened to his feet, and it was almost more than his strength could accomplish to lift them up and ascend the steps.

"Oh," he muttered to himself, "if I could only find that it was untrue—that they have deceived me—what a relief it would be!"

He reached the top step and emerged on to the roof.

Fortunately the stone parapet was so high as to preclude all danger of his falling into the street, or it is probable, in his great agitation, he might have done such a thing.

Clutching the stonework nervously with his hands, he hastened onwards, until at last he reached the spot which commanded a view of Newgate Street.

Then a cry of despair issued from his lips, and, his strength suddenly deserting him, he sank down in a strange crouching posture.

At that moment he must have felt like Macbeth, when, from the ramparts of his castle, he saw his worst fears confirmed, and saw Birnam Wood approaching Dunsinane.

The sight of Jonathan Wild being brought towards



[JONATHAN WILD INSISTS UPON BEING FREED FROM HIS FETTERS.]

Newgate under so strong an escort, completely prostrated him.

A singular kind of fascination, however, caused him to raise himself a little, so that his eyes were just above the level of the parapet, and so that he could see down into the street.

By this time the procession was almost immediately below him.

He could see the officers, he could see the soldiers, and he could see the multitude behind.

But it was not on these that his gaze rested.

His eyes were riveted upon Jonathan Wild.

There he saw him, and such was the state of desperation that the Governor had worked himself up into, that he even wished the huge stone he clutched was loose, and that he could hurl it down upon the head of the prisoner, and so cause his death.

He even fumbled in his pockets with the vague idea

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that he should find a pistol there, and with the equally vague intention, if he had, of firing it at Jonathan Wild.

But his search was unsuccessful, and the prisoner passed the corner.

Letting go his hold of the parapet, he once more cowered down upon the roof, and grovelled there, as contemptible and miserable an object as could well have been beheld.

Surely the punishment of the corrupt and villanous Governor of Newgate had commenced.

In his despair and dread of what was going to happen in the future, he muttered dismal groans and dashed his head violently against the lead-covered roof.

In prospective he saw no end of troubles, dangers, and difficulties.

He had the greatest dread of Jonathan Wild, and ten times more now that the thief-taker was a prisoner.

"He has reached the end of his career," wailed Mr. Noakes. "He is going—going down, and I know very well

that he will drag me down along with him! I can see my error now! What a fool I must have been to have had any dealings with such a man. But I thought then I was acting for the best—I thought I was acting for the best!"

Slowly the Governor raised himself to his feet, and straightened his disordered apparel.

Although his mind was in such a state of confusion, he had a dim consciousness that it would be necessary for him to descend to the vestibule, and receive the prisoner when he was brought in.

He made his way towards the trap door above the steps he had ascended, and, passing through it, he crept down again.

Ere he had gone far, he heard some one calling him.

He tried to respond, but his voice failed him.

The nearer he got to the vestibule the greater his dread of meeting the thief-taker became.

"How will he look?" he asked himself, in nervous anxiety. "What will he say? Oh, he is a desperate wretch, and no doubt is in a furious rage! When he sees me his passion will increase, and who knows what dreadful words he may utter?"

The Governor was sadly afraid that Jonathan should disclose some secret, or make some remark that would be taken up by those who heard it, and repeated until it led to an investigation.

How true it is that a guilty conscience needs no accuser.

The Governor needed none, and the suspense and terror he endured while in this state of suspense was even worse than actual ill could have been.

He had to pause several times in his descent.

To reach the vestibule by the nearest route it was necessary for him to pass through those apartments in the prison which were allotted to his own use.

Upon entering one of them he sank down breathless and almost insensible upon a chair. Scarcely had he done so, than some one tapped at the door, and one of the turnkeys entered.

"Oh, you are here, sir! If you please," he said, "I have been looking all about for you—you are wanted at once!"

The Governor looked up, and when the turnkey beheld his countenance he exclaimed:

"Dear me, Mr. Noakes, how ill you look!"

"I am ill, Saunders—very ill. Go to yonder cupboard; you will find some brandy there pour some out."

Saunders obeyed.

The Governor swallowed nearly a quarter of a pint of brandy at a gulp, then, gasping for breath, he said:

"Come, what is it, Saunders?—what do you want?"

"If you please, sir, it's Mr. Ford wants you in the vestibule."

Ford was the name of the chief police officer.

"Would you believe it, Mr. Noakes?" continued Saunders. "They have actually brought Mr. Jonathan Wild a prisoner! There is no doubt about it, and Mr. Ford wants to hand you the warrant, and receive the receipt as usual."

"I am almost too ill to attend to any business, Saunders, but I suppose I must go. You say he has got Jonathan Wild a prisoner?"

"Yes, Mr. Noakes."

"Then I will write out the receipt now, and take it down with me to save time."

The Governor rose, and, having filled up the usual form which was handed to the officer who brought a prisoner in, he traversed the short corridor which led to the vestibule.

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXV.

FORD THE OFFICER GIVES THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE A WORD OF ADVICE, AND JONATHAN WILD CHANGES HIS TACTICS.

CALLOUS-HEARTED as he was, Jonathan Wild felt a cold, disagreeable chill come over him when the large door leading to the street was closed with an ominous clang.

And yet it was by no means the first time he had stood and heard that sound.

It was familiar enough to him; but whenever he had heard it before, his position was very different to what it was now.

He was a prisoner.

Not wishing his captors to observe the effect which his

entrance into the prison had had upon him, he raised his head and looked around him with an air of cool defiance.

The clanging of that door produced a far different effect upon the mind of Ford the police officer.

A sigh of relief came from his lips, and he felt himself heartily glad that his trouble with his prisoner was over.

His men also congratulated themselves, and counted heads, in order that they might tell how much each would receive as his share of the reward.

"Where is Mr. Noakes?" said Ford, addressing one of the astonished turnkeys. "He is not out, is he?"

"No, I think not," stammered Saunders, in reply.

"Then go and find him immediately, and tell him that I am here with an important prisoner."

Saunders withdrew, and was absent some time, until at length he returned, the Governor with him.

While he was gone a strange silence prevailed in the vestibule.

A dogged, sullen expression had settled upon Wild's face, and the officers, Ford included, directed their eyes towards the door through which Saunders had passed, expecting every moment to see him return.

Several turnkeys were present.

Some had been seated on the bench in the vestibule, but they quickly rose up on the entrance of the prisoner, and three more came out of the adjoining chamber.

They exchanged significant glances with each other when they discovered it was Jonathan Wild who had been brought in.

No expression of triumph or satisfaction appeared upon their countenances, as one would have almost expected. The fact was, they thought Jonathan Wild would prove a very troublesome prisoner.

The silence, then, remained unbroken till the Governor made his appearance.

All noticed how pale, agitated, and ill he looked.

Upon entering, Mr. Noakes could not resist looking at the thief-taker, in order that he might judge by his appearance whether he would be likely to make matters disagreeable.

Jonathan saw how troubled and alarmed the Governor was, and attributed his agitation to its right cause.

He smiled exultingly, and felt a malicious pleasure at seeing his accomplice in a state of such mental distress.

Wild contented himself by darting one significant glance at the Governor.

Then he bent his head forward and looked down upon the ground.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Mr. Noakes," said Ford. "You really look very unwell, but you see I have a good excuse—I have brought you a prisoner of importance."

The Governor smiled in a sickly fashion, and made two efforts before he could speak.

Then, in an absent, jerking way, he said:

"Yes, yes—oh yes, certainly!"

"Here is the warrant for his apprehension," said Ford, producing a folded paper from his pocket; "you will find it all right, and I shall be glad to exchange it with you for a receipt."

The Governor rubbed his hands together and tried to appear at ease.

It was quite a failure, however.

Still he took the receipt from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Ford, who in return gave him the warrant.

The Governor opened it.

"It is all right, is it not?" said Ford, as he placed the receipt in his pocket. "You see my instructions upon it were to capture the prisoner, and then lodge him at once in Newgate. You will see also that it enjoins you to take the greatest possible care of him, and to use every precaution you may think necessary and advisable in order to keep him in safe custody."

The Governor nodded and Wild looked up.

Ford continued:

"The warrant does not say what you are to do in order to keep him secure, and I don't wish to interfere or teach you your duty; I will only say this, I have had a great deal of trouble in capturing him, and a great deal of trouble in bringing him here; and if I was in your place I should put him in irons and confine him in the strongest cell in the prison."

"Thank you, Mr. Ford—thank you," said Wild, turning round and making an ironical bow. "I am very much obliged to you—very much indeed; your consideration is

really quite overpowering. You may depend that I shall not forget it!"

Wild accompanied these words with such a peculiar look and such a peculiar tone that Ford felt quite uncomfortable, and wished he had not spoken.

The next moment he felt inclined to laugh at his fears.

Jonathan Wild, he thought, was now as harmless as some venomous reptile whose fangs had been extracted.

The Governor looked greatly distressed.

"I will see to him," he said, at last, "never fear that; you will leave him to me; he is in my charge now, and I am responsible. He will be safe enough, I'll warrant!"

"That is all right, Mr. Noakes. I hope you will excuse, but I only spoke as I did by way of caution. You have had one or two escapes from the prison——"

The Governor made a wry face.

"And," continued Ford, "if Mr. Wild was to escape, you may depend the consequences would be serious. All his villainies have been discovered, and the Government is determined fully to punish him!"

"Yes—yes! Very well."

The Governor spoke as though he would have been glad for Ford to go, but that officer was rather officious.

"Shall you put him in irons, Mr. Noakes?" he asked.

"If you take my advice you will, as I said before; and I speak now, because if you have made up your mind and do so I will stay, and my men will render you any assistance you may require."

"No—no thank you!" said the Governor, nervously. "Just leave him to me."

"Well, it's no business of mine. Good morning, Mr. Noakes—good morning!"

"Good morning!" returned the Governor.

Jonathan Wild again raised his head and looked at Ford.

"Good morning!" he said, in his former ironical tone. "I am really quite sorry to be deprived of your company; I had no idea that I had a friend who was so solicitous about my welfare. As I told you, I shall not forget it!"

The same uncomfortable feeling came over Ford's heart, nor did he feel better until he had reached the street.

Then he drew a long breath, and said:

"How glad I am that that job is over, and that he is out of my hands!"

Jonathan Wild and the Governor stood face to face in the vestibule, regarding each other curiously enough.

A silence ensued between them of several moments, and it might have lasted much longer had not Jonathan been the first to speak.

The turnkeys had formed round the thief-taker in a group, yet none ventured to lay hold of him.

"This is a ridiculous affair, is it not, Mr. Noakes?" said Wild, in tones of the greatest unconcern.

He had resolved upon a particular course of action, and had changed his tactics accordingly.

The Governor looked greatly astonished; it was not at all the sort of speech that he fancied Wild would make.

In accordance with a long-established rule, however, he said:

"Yes, yes—very ridiculous!"

He made it a point never to say anything in opposition to Jonathan.

"It is a most ridiculous affair," continued Wild; "it places you in a false and awkward position. I know if I stood there as you do I should feel quite vexed and annoyed, as I dare say you do. However, don't let me be the least trouble to you, it is the fate of all great men to have enemies. I had mine, as I have found to my cost, and doubtless you have yours, and there are certain persons who would be glad to lay hold of anything that they could repeat to your disadvantage."

Jonathan laid a particular emphasis upon the words "certain persons," and then continued his extraordinary speech:

"Do not let my being brought here a prisoner be a source of annoyance or uneasiness to yourself; the only favour I have to ask of you is this, that you will simply do your duty. You need not fear that I shall be offended; the fault is none of yours, and so to keep yourself right, I say, do your duty, and treat me just as the warrant commands; I shall think none the worse of you for it!"

Had not Mr. Noakes known Jonathan Wild so well as

he did, he would have been completely deceived by this very plausible speech.

As it was, he felt more uncomfortable than ever, because he knew very well that Jonathan Wild meant playing some very deep game indeed.

What it was he was at a loss to conceive.

He assumed as much composure as he could.

"I never thought to see you here, Mr. Wild, and I am exceedingly sorry for it. As you have said truly, I feel in a difficult position; I was afraid of offending you, and yet I felt I must do my duty. However, now that you have spoken as you have, all is quite easy and plain."

"Quite," returned Wild, "and whatever you do I shall not consider any act of your own, but the act of those whose instrument you are, and whose commands you are bound to perform."

The turnkeys listened to this conversation with very great amazement; they could not make out what Wild meant by making so many civil speeches to the Governor.

The thief-taker had a motive, and a good one, which will be apparent in due time.

"I must lock you up in a cell, Mr. Wild," said the Governor: "I am obliged to do that."

"Shall you take the advice that Ford was so very kind as to offer?"

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Noakes, with great emphasis. "Put irons on you indeed, an innocent man! I know you are innocent; and apart from that, it is always my principle to consider every man innocent until he is proved guilty."

The turnkeys looked slyly at each other when the Governor spoke, and the muscles around their mouths quivered and twitched as though they would have been glad to have given a prolonged whistle of astonishment if they had only dared to do so.

"That is a sentiment which does you great honour, Mr. Noakes," said Wild.

The Governor bowed.

"I should never have thought of putting irons on a prisoner under such circumstances. I have my own opinion of Mr. Ford."

"And so have I," returned Jonathan; "but I don't wish to keep you waiting here wasting your valuable time. Just show me to a cell."

"You shall go to number twenty-three, Mr. Wild," said the Governor; "it is the cleanest and most comfortable cell in the prison, and I will take care that things are not made unnecessarily uncomfortable for you."

Then, turning round to Saunders, the Governor said:

"Get the keys of number twenty-three, and come with me and Mr. Wild; and as you are all present, let me tell you to treat Mr. Wild with the greatest respect."

Saunders unlocked a door leading into a corridor.

The Governor and Jonathan followed, complimenting each other by the way.

In a few minutes the cell was reached.

The Governor had spoken the truth when he said it was the most comfortable cell in the prison.

In the first place it was clean, and then there was a barred window through which came a plentiful supply of light, and this was a great deal, for generally speaking the cells in old Newgate were very dirty and very dark.

"Here I must leave you then, Mr. Wild," said the Governor. "You must make yourself as comfortable as you can under the circumstances. There will be a man stationed outside your door, and if you want anything you have only to call out and your wishes will be immediately attended to."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Noakes," replied the thief-taker, "and when this little affair is over, you may depend upon my showing my gratitude in a substantial manner."

Mr. Noakes bowed.

"I only want to do my duty, and when I have done it I always think I am sufficiently rewarded."

"Still, I shall give you a testimonial of some kind, and I hope you will not deprive me of the pleasure which I shall feel if you accept it."

After a few more speeches of the like nature, which were uttered for the especial edification of Saunders and the other turnkeys, Mr. Noakes withdrew.

The cell door was securely fastened, and a man was posted on the outside in order that good guard should be kept in the corridor.

CHAPTER CCCCXXXVI.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS TIME PASS VERY UNPLEASANTLY IN THE NEWGATE CELL.

No sooner had the door closed, and no sooner did Jonathan Wild find himself alone, than a most remarkable and entire change came over him.

He listened to the sound of their retreating footsteps along the corridor, and as he did so his countenance assumed such a hideous and diabolical expression that no one could have looked upon him without fear and trembling.

His first occupation was to stride up and down the cell, and while he did so he gnashed his teeth and uttered such curses as would have frozen a listener's blood.

"Betrayed!" he said. "Yes, yes—I have been betrayed; but I will be revenged upon them all—I will have a full, deep, and deadly vengeance! Curses on this unlucky day! Everything has gone wrong! First, there was the bank! Oh, George—George!" he cried, in a changed tone, "you are a heartless, unmitigated scoundrel! You have been a bad son to me, and I have been a fool to trust and place so much dependence on you! I know his course—I can see it all now! He looked upon me merely as his tool—as a stopping-stone! He will reap the advantage of all my toil! He has the greatest part of my wealth—I might say the whole of it. He has the papers relating to the Donnull estate. He will suffer me to perish without making the least effort to save or assist me. I know it—I know it,—that is his scheme!"

The thief-taker ceased, and paced up and down his cell several times without speaking.

But his thoughts were of too violent a nature to be restrained.

They demanded an outlet, and he was obliged to avail himself of the only relief in his power, and that was by speaking aloud.

"He shall fail!" he said, with sudden energy,—"he shall fail! I can see my way out of this position; perilous as it seems to be, all will be perfectly easy, and then, when I am at liberty, I will devote myself to the task of foiling his plans! Yes, yes—that is it!"

He ceased again, but almost immediately continued in tones of the greatest exultation:

"Ha, ha!—a good thought—a brave thought! Unknown to him, I will do all I can to bring his schemes and plans to a successful issue; he shall be elated by the prospect of achieving that upon which he has set his heart; and when he feels that he has but to put forth his hand and take,—when, indeed, he is in the act of putting the cup of pleasure to his lips, I will dash it to the earth. He shall fail in the moment of success, and fail so utterly and completely that he will never have the heart to make a second effort! That is a good thought, and one easily carried out! That shall be the beginning of my revenge!"

Having come to this comfortable conclusion, Wild became much calmer.

He seated himself upon the miserable little pallet in the cell, and, clasping his hands over his eyes, gloated in imagination over his prospects.

Starting up, he continued his rapid walk up and down, and from time to time uttered his fierce ejaculations.

Jonathan Wild was under the impression, and not without some reason, that it was to the treachery of Powell that he owed his arrest.

In this he was wrong. The officers had been clever enough to penetrate his disguise, and had taken up their position in the stable to wait for his return in the manner we have formerly recorded.

It was the sudden recollection of Powell which caused Wild to start to his feet.

"Curse the villain!" he cried; "he has betrayed me! Had it not been for him, I should at least have escaped in safety. It must be him; no one else knew that I was disguised as a Quaker; and, in spite of my warning and his own protestations, he determined to try and obtain the reward. But he shall suffer! I have but to utter a few words, and he will be the inmate of one of these gloomy cells; and when he is tried, the evidence will be so complete that he will be sentenced to death without doubt! He will die, and at Tyburn! It serves him right!"

The thief-taker was considerably consoled by this reflection.

"Yes," he repeated, "he shall suffer! I will have my revenge upon him at once! As soon as I am a little calmer, I will call for pen and ink. An anonymous letter stating where he is to be found will be sufficient to do his business! No doubt he thought to himself that he had managed matters very cleverly indeed; but he must have been mad if he thought I should not suspect him of putting the officers on my track! It is not, however, worth my while to waste another thought upon him; his fate is as good as settled!"

It was wonderful to see what a soothing effect this had upon Wild's mind.

He was not half so chafed and angry as he had been, and began to take a calmer and better survey of his condition.

"I think I can make sure of getting myself out of this difficulty," he muttered. "Of course the charge they will prefer against me will be that of having the stolen lace in my possession. Bah! that is nothing; still, I have no doubt it will enable the magistrate to order my committal to Newgate; and while I am here waiting for the sessions to commence, who can tell what they may rake up against me? The gold lace is but a mere pretext; but I can't see how I am to prevent it answering their purpose."

Wild tried hard to think, but presently he gave up the attempt in despair; for even if he did succeed in rebutting or weakening the evidence brought against him with respect to the robbery of the gold lace, another charge would be preferred, and then another, so that his committal might be said to be absolutely certain.

He felt this, and so desisted.

"I may as well be committed on that charge as any other," he said. "Let me see—when will the next sessions commence? On the seventeenth of this month. That is exactly ten days hence. Between now and then I shall have ample time to consider what I shall do."

He walked to the door of the cell, and knocked loudly at it with his knuckles.

The man outside opened a little barred wicket in the upper portion of the door and looked in.

"Did you knock, Mr. Wild, if you please, sir?"

"Yes, Chambers. Tell Mr. Noakes I want pens and ink immediately!"

"All right, Mr. Wild!"

The man slammed the little wicket shut and disappeared. In a few minutes he returned with writing materials.

"Now to settle Jack Powell's business!" said Jonathan Wild, as he seated himself at the rude table in the cell.

Taking the largest piece of paper, he wrote upon it, in great sprawling characters:—

"Of course you remember at the time of the trial that just one link was wanting to complete the chain of evidence. That missing link I can supply. You will find it in the person of a man named John Powell, who keeps a wardrobe shop at the address given below."

Wild wrote at the foot of the note the name of the street and the number of the house in which Powell resided.

"That will do," he said. "I rather think that will settle Jack Powell's hash, and serve him right! What a fool he was to betray me!"

He folded up the letter as he spoke, and addressed it.

"I feel quite in a letter-writing humour; and now that I have the writing materials before me, I may as well make use of them. I may as well write to my friend the Secretary of State."

Owing to the peculiar position in which he had lately been placed, Jonathan Wild knew nothing about the change in the ministry that had taken place.

He imagined that the same corrupt wretch whom he had frequently addressed, and whose ready tool he had always been, still occupied the post of Secretary of State.

Under this impression, Jonathan Wild wrote as follows:—

"My Lord,—

"Once more the most humble and most obedient of your lordship's servants takes the liberty of addressing you. My lord, you may not be aware that I have been this day arrested in the streets of London upon some ridiculous charge of which I am perfectly innocent, and lodged in the prison of Newgate like a condemned felon.

I suppose in the morning I shall be taken before the magistrate; and I hope your lordship, out of consideration for the many eminent services I have rendered you, will take such steps as will procure my release from my present unpleasant position.

"From your lordship's most humble servant,
"now lying in Newgate,

"JONATHAN WILD.

"P.S.—I hope your lordship will not overlook this little affair, or neglect my application, because, in the event of your doing so, it is just possible that my memory may serve me a trick, when I might let out something connected with your lordship, which you would fain have concealed from the public ear.

"J. W."

Wild said no more, but folded up the letter and addressed it.

The threat contained in the postscript was a very ambiguous one, but he knew the Secretary of State would perfectly understand it.

The thief-taker possessed a knowledge of some very dangerous secrets in connection with the late Government, and some of them were of such a nature that if disclosed they would inevitably drag down the Secretary and his colleagues to the lowest depths of ruin and degradation.

"I feel quite comfortable now," said Jonathan, with a ferocious grin. "Those are two capital letters, upon my word! One will give me full revenge upon the man who has betrayed me, and the other will get me out of this cell. I don't care now how soon to-morrow comes."

Jonathan rapped at the door again, and desired the man to go for Mr. Noakes.

The Governor received the message with dismay and dread; he wondered what Wild could have to say to him so soon.

He entered the cell with a heavy heart.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Noakes," said Wild, affecting to be exceedingly polite, "but I have written two letters of the greatest importance, and I want you to have them delivered immediately."

"All right, Mr. Wild," said the Governor, glancing at the addresses—"all right! I will have them delivered at once. Is there anything else you want?"

Mr. Noakes felt quite relieved.

"Brandy," said Wild—"that is what I want; bring me in a stone bottle full."

"You shall have it, Mr. Wild, though it is against the regulations. However, I can't do less than oblige you in this."

"And oblige me still more by having those letters delivered with all speed, for the sooner they reach their destination the better."

The Governor withdrew, and he went back to his own apartments feeling lighter-hearted and more at ease than he had done since Jonathan's arrival.

When the brandy was brought to him, Jonathan Wild drank deeply.

He swallowed the fiery liquid as though it had been water, and it appeared to take not the least effect upon him.

It soothed his mind, however, and he was calmer and more contented than he had been since the moment of his arrest. He believed that he saw the way out of his difficulty.

"His lordship," he muttered, "will be afraid of my babbling, and will take care to have me set at liberty; and when I am once free, if they can catch me I will give them leave to hang me at once."

The remainder of the day passed by slowly and wearily. Jonathan waited with great anxiety for a reply to his letter from the Secretary.

Night came, however, without his hearing anything.

At first this gave him some uneasiness, but gradually he calmed himself.

"It's all right, of course—it's all right! I don't suppose he would take the trouble to send any reply to the letter; he would consider it would be quite sufficient to attend to it; so it is—he is quite right. If I could only lie down now and sleep till morning, how glad I should be! I'll try."

Jonathan did try, but sleep never came near his eyelids.

His brain was working all the time, for his thoughts were continually wandering in fresh directions.

Night approached, and the gloomy cell became involved in darkness.

In the obscurity, dark, shadowy forms appeared to be flitting hither and thither, and the thief-taker was obliged to close his eyes and clasp his hands over them to shut out these phantoms.

At last, worn out both bodily and mentally, and lulled by the darkness and the deep draughts of brandy he had taken, the thief-taker fell off into an uneasy slumber.

He was, however, tortured by such hideous dreams that sleep became a horror.

He tossed about on his couch, and waved his arms wildly, while strange, gasping, guttural noises came from his throat.

His countenance wore an expression of the most frenzied terror.

The dreams that were passing through his mind were truly of an awful character.

One time he fancied he was pursued by a band of grisly spectres, all of whom had over their heads the frightful-looking white caps which are drawn over the culprits' faces to hide the horrible contortion of features produced by the strangulation.

They had halters round their necks, and they stretched out their arms towards him, and shrieked out horribly for him to pause.

Overcome with horror, Wild fancied he endeavoured to fly onwards, but his limbs became heavy as lead; his feet glued themselves to the ground, so that motion was almost impossible.

Spectres surrounded him.

Each one took off the halter from round its neck, and cast it over his own, then all pulled in opposite directions.

Uttering a loud yell of fear and pain, Jonathan Wild awoke.

Instinctively he carried his hands to his throat, where he felt a dreadful choking sensation.

So vivid was this vision that he could scarcely believe that it was not real.

As soon as he ascertained that it was a dream, however, and that he was alone in that dismal prison cell, he got up and struggled to the table on which the brandy stood.

He trembled from head to foot, but he drank deeply.

"Oh, it is horrible!" he muttered, with a shudder—"most horrible! I shall dread to sleep again! Why am I tormented with these frightful visions? What can it mean?"

Jonathan Wild sat down and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

He was a superstitious man, and attributed these visions to some supernatural cause, and believed they portended something.

The night passed slowly away.

To Jonathan it seemed an age from the time he awoke to the time when the light first began to struggle faintly into his cell.

"I am thankful," he said, "that day has come at last! In a few hours I shall be set at liberty, and then all will be well!"

CHAPTER CCCCLXXXVII.

JONATHAN WILD IS BROUGHT BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE AT BOW STREET.

JONATHAN WILD passed the time between then and breakfast in various ruminations.

He felt very anxious about the letter which he had addressed to the Secretary of State.

He wondered what sort of notice would be taken of it, and what course the Secretary would adopt to effect his release.

"It would be an immense advantage to me," he said, "if I only possessed some clue as to their intentions. I should then be able to assume a behaviour in accordance with my situation; now I am like one in the dark. However, I must make the best of it, and do the best I can."

When breakfast came he asked for the Governor, and Mr. Noakes, reassured by the interview he had had on the preceding night, came in readily enough.

"I suppose I shall be taken before the magistrate this morning, Mr. Noakes?" said Wild.

"You will."
 "To Bow Street?"
 "Yes."
 "Which magistrate will sit to-day?"
 "Mr. Fielding."
 Wild ground his teeth savagely.
 "Curse him! I hate him for an officious rascal!"
 "He is no friend of yours, Mr. Wild," said the Governor.
 "I know it. Are you sure that he will sit to-day?"
 "Quite."
 "You sent my letter last night?"
 "Yes."
 "Have you had no reply?"
 "No. If I had, you would have received it instantly."
 "No message of any kind?"
 "None at all. Where did you expect one from?"
 "The Secretary of State."
 "You mean the late Secretary."
 "Late Secretary?" yelled Wild, in a voice that made the Governor jump again. "What do you mean by that?"
 "Just what I say."

For an instant Wild was quite overwhelmed.
 He could not bring himself to believe that a change of ministry had taken place so suddenly and so quickly, and that his venial patron was no longer possessed of power.
 "There has been a change of ministry, then?" he gasped out.

"Yes, there has—the Whigs are now in power. But is it possible that you did not know this?"

"I hadn't the least idea of it!" returned Wild—"such a thought never entered my head! I have not heard a syllable breathed about the matter! Curses on this unlucky occurrence—it has upset all my plans!"

"I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Wild! I thought it was rather strange when I glanced at the address yesterday, but I said nothing, for I thought you ought to know your own business best."

"I wish you had spoken," said Wild, nervously. "The intelligence you have just given me would have been worth pounds, could I have received it a few hours ago; now I am taken at unawares, and have no time to concert any fresh scheme."

"I should not let a change in the ministry produce any effect upon me; if the Secretary had remained in office, he would probably have disregarded your appeal."

"Would he?" replied Wild—"I rather think not—he knew better than that. I had him in my power—ay, as much in my power as I have you!"

A yellow tint crept over the Governor's face as Wild thus spoke, and the tip of his nose assumed a bluish tinge.

"I could have compelled him to pay attention," said the thief-taker; "now it's too late—it is no good thinking about it, or grieving; he cannot assist me, and so I must assist myself."

"Can I be of any service to you, Mr. Wild?" asked the Governor—"I should only be too glad to receive your commands!"

"You shall have them, never fear!" said Jonathan, with a meaning glance. "When the time comes, you will receive my commands; and, what is more, you *will* obey them!"

The last three words were uttered in a tone of deep meaning, and the Governor felt more uncomfortable than before.

"Leave me now," said Wild, "I want a little reflection."

"Very good!"

"How long can I have?"

"You will have to go to Bow Street in half an hour."

"That will do. Tell the man outside to get what I want quickly."

"I will, Mr. Wild. I will attend faithfully to all your instructions."

Jonathan sat down and covered his face with his hands.

The unexpected intelligence which the Governor had communicated to him had disconcerted his plans, and he was almost at a loss to know how to proceed, or what line of conduct to decide upon.

He had but a little time for reflection, and at length raising his head, he muttered:

"I must face the matter out as well as I am able. I

will assume an air of injured innocence. I will try whether I can't elicit the sympathy of the magistrate. Even if I am committed it will not much matter, for I have another scheme ready, and a most effectual one."

Jonathan rose, and, going to the door, asked for water.

Some was brought to him, and he washed himself thoroughly, and endeavoured to make himself look as much like a human being as possible.

To some extent he succeeded, for Jonathan Wild always looked very much better when the dirt with which his face was usually coated was removed.

By the time he had finished his toilet the cell door was opened, and the officers appeared who were to conduct him to the police court.

At the time of which we write, the large black vans in which prisoners are removed from one place to another were not in use, and had not been thought of.

It was the general rule to link all the prisoners together and lead them through the streets, when there was always a yelling, shouting mob at their heels.

An exception was sometimes made in the case of any great criminal.

It was deemed advisable after their former experience not to attempt to take Wild through the streets, and so a hackney-coach was provided, into which he was forced to enter.

The handcuffs were put on, as a precautionary measure, and, guarded by a strong force of constables, the thief-taker passed through the corridors of the prison, and out at the gate into the coach.

Just as they were descending the steps, Wild made a sudden and frantic dash to escape.

He was in hopes of being able to take the officers by surprise, and had he done so, in all probability he would have succeeded in getting off.

But they were expecting some such movement, and were fully prepared for it.

Wild looked savage when his plan was defeated, but said not a word.

He did not take it much to heart, and he had made the attempt, not because he thought he should succeed, but merely as the thought darted into his mind.

As many police officers as the vehicle would hold were crowded in with him, the doors were shut, then one mounted by the side of the driver and four more sat on the top.

In this way Jonathan Wild was taken from Newgate to the Bow Street Police Court.

He was in imminent danger of being suffocated, so closely did the officers press round him.

Escape was impossible, for he was unable to move a single limb.

He felt quite thankful when at length the coach drew up in Bow Street.

The police officers descended from the roof, and summoned others from the station opposite, and formed a double line extending from the door of the coach to the door of the court.

Then they returned and let Wild out.

As swiftly as possible they hurried him inside the building and closed the door.

In accordance with the plan which he had determined upon adopting, Jonathan Wild assumed a gentle manner.

He stood up, with his head bent forward and his chin resting upon his breast, as though he was quite overcome by his situation.

He suffered himself to be led, without the least show of resistance, to the strong little room adjoining the court, in which the prisoners await their turn to be called up to the bar.

It had been agreed that the magistrate should take his seat upon the bench somewhat earlier than usual that morning, and that Jonathan's case should be attended to first, before the usual night charges were brought up.

Consequently he had the little room to himself.

Much to the surprise of the police officers, who expected he would be extremely violent, he seated himself with a well-assumed air of passiveness and resignation.

He was not kept waiting long, for the magistrate arrived punctually and took his seat.

The prisoner was then brought before him.

Although the hour was an earlier one than usual, and though this fact had been kept back from the knowledge of

the public, nevertheless the little justice room was completely filled with spectators.

There was not a single corner unoccupied, and they were so closely packed together that they could not move.

Upon his entrance the thief-taker was greeted with a succession of groans which were with difficulty subdued, and it was not until the magistrate threatened to have the court cleared that they became silent.

The Mr. Fielding who presided on this occasion was no other than the celebrated novelist of that name.

His aversion to Jonathan Wild and his detestation of his doings were well known to everyone, and it was only a few weeks before that he had published a pamphlet in which many of Wild's villainies were exposed.

True to his purpose, Jonathan Wild stood in the dock, as he believed, with the air and in the attitude of a martyr.

Mr. Fielding regarded him with some surprise, for Wild's demeanour was exactly opposite to what he expected it to be.

The clerk of the court handed the charge-sheet to the magistrate, who, looking at it, said:

"Is your name Jonathan Wild?"

"It is, your worship."

Wild's tones were respectful in the extreme.

"You are charged here with being guilty of the offence of having in your possession a quantity of gold lace, you well knowing the same to be stolen. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, your worship," said Wild, in the same respectful voice; "I am quite innocent. The charge is one which has been brought against me by my enemies, and—"

"There, there—that will do; we want to hear no more! You plead not guilty?"

"Yes, your worship."

"That will do."

Wild's plea was then duly recorded, and the officer who had been employed to make the search among the ruins of Wild's house was called into the witness-box.

Jonathan continued to keep his head bent forward, but by rolling his eyes he managed to catch a glimpse of the officer's face without appearing to make a movement.

Jonathan Wild was acquainted with all the members of the police force, from highest to lowest, and he recognised this one immediately.

He bit his lip with vexation.

He knew him to be a man whose character was unimpeachable, and who had a high, strict sense of justice.

He was gifted with a larger amount of intellect than the generality of his companions, and he had also received what in those days was considered a good education.

From such a man Jonathan Wild had everything to fear.

He would give his evidence clearly and impartially, and it would require more tact and acumen than the thief-taker possessed to baffle him or to throw discredit upon his testimony.

Wild resolved, however, to pay particular attention to all he said, and not to omit to lay hold of the slightest circumstance that might benefit him.

The people in the court were very quiet, for without exception they were desirous of hearing what this officer had to say, and becoming acquainted with the exact charge which was to be preferred against Jonathan Wild.

CHAPTER CCOCLXXXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD IS DULY COMMITTED TO TAKE HIS TRIAL AT THE NEXT OLD BAILEY SESSIONS.

THE police officer in the witness-box, whose name was Barnet, was then duly sworn.

"Now," said the clerk, "be good enough to state what you know with respect to the prisoner at the bar."

"From instructions I received," commenced Barnet, "I paid a visit to the ruins of Jonathan Wild's house in Newgate Street, on the night of Saturday last."

"You received the instructions from your inspector, I presume?" said Mr. Fielding.

"Yes, your worship."

"Well, go on!"

"I took with me two men, and made with them a

thorough examination of the premises, which, as your worship is doubtless aware, were destroyed by fire a little more than a week ago."

"Yes—yes!"

"I found the basement of the house choked up with rubbish, and with a good deal of trouble I sifted and searched the whole over."

"And what did you find?" asked Mr. Fielding.

"A box containing—"

"Stop!—have you the box?"

"Yes, your worship."

"Produce it, then!"

The witness turned round and spoke to an officer who was near him, and who, nodding his head, went into an adjoining room, and returned with a rather large box in his arms.

He gave this to Barnet, who not without some difficulty succeeded in balancing it upon the edge of the witness-box.

It was so placed as to conceal him from the view of the people in the court, and also from the prisoner.

When Jonathan heard the box mentioned, he slightly raised his head, and eagerly watched the movements of the officer who brought it from the next room.

A glance seemed to satisfy Wild with respect to this box, and he bent his head down again.

The examination continued.

"Is that the box you found among the ruins?" asked the magistrate.

"It is, your worship."

"Did you open it upon the spot?"

"I did."

"And what did it contain?"

"A quantity of gold lace, your worship."

"Open the box."

Barnet did so, and the gold lace was disclosed.

"There were eleven pieces of lace in this box," continued Barnet; "in all, about fifty yards."

"That is enough," said the magistrate—"without you have anything further to describe with respect to the discoveries you made."

"Other discoveries were made," said Barnet, "but I am told it will not be necessary to refer to them here, the object being merely to produce such evidence as will warrant the commitment of the prisoner to Newgate."

"It will be necessary, then, to show that the lace which you have found was really stolen, which has not been done at present."

"A witness is in waiting, your worship, who will swear upon this point; and there are also the two officers who were with me when I discovered the box, and who witnessed the opening of it."

"Very good," said Mr. Fielding; "you can stand down—without the prisoner has any questions to ask of you."

Jonathan Wild raised his head.

"I have a few words to say to the witness, your worship, if you will allow me."

"Certainly—certainly!"

"Would your worship order that box to be removed from where it now is, because I cannot see the witness?"

Mr. Fielding nodded, and the box was removed.

"Now, Barnet," said Wild, sharply—"that is your name, I believe?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"You said my house had been burnt down, but you omitted to inform the Court on what day, or rather night, that misfortune occurred. Would you mind doing so now?"

"Certainly not!" said Barnet. "To the best of my belief, your house was burnt down on the night of Thursday week. I can't swear to it, however, for I was not present at the fire, but I have been told that was the day."

"You are quite correct, Barnet—it was Thursday. And do you happen to know where I was at that particular time?"

"You, Mr. Wild?"

"Yes—where was I? Wasn't I in a cell in Newgate, where I had been for several days and nights previous, watching over Jack Sheppard, in order to prevent him making another escape from Newgate?"

"I believe you were, Mr. Wild."

"I was—I can bring a dozen witnesses to prove, from the time I brought Jack Sheppard into Newgate I never

left him, but remained by his side until the hour of execution arrived, and I accompanied the condemned prisoner to Tyburn."

"But," interrupted Mr. Fielding, "what has all this got to do with the case?"

"Everything, your worship," said Wild, still preserving his humble demeanour and respectful tone of voice. "From what has now been admitted, you will see yourself that I had not visited my house for a long time, and that when the box was found in the manner described I was at that moment the inmate of a cell, as I also was when my house was burnt down."

"Well, what defence do you set up?"

"No defence at all, your worship, for I presume you will commit me for trial."

"I have no other resource after this evidence."

"Then I only wish to state that I know nothing about that box—nothing about the gold lace it contains; that I never saw either in the whole course of my life, until they were produced a few minutes ago; that I had no knowledge anything of the kind was in my house; and I can only account for its presence among the ruins by the supposition that some one placed it there in order to bring a charge against me."

"But, your worship," said Barnet, "I don't see how it is possible for anyone to have hidden the box among the rubbish in the way that the prisoner supposes, because from the time of the fire until I went in to search, the premises were barricaded, and a police officer constantly kept on guard over them."

"That point will have to be gone into at another time and before another person," said Mr. Fielding; "I have nothing to do with it; all I require is some evidence that the gold lace found was stolen."

"That evidence will be forthcoming, your worship. The two men who were with me at the time of the search are in the adjoining room, and will corroborate what I have said."

"Let them be called first, then."

The two police officers who had accompanied Barnet were placed in the witness-box in succession.

They each swore distinctly to the truth of what the former witness had said, and corroborated his evidence in every particular.

"Who is the next witness?" asked Mr. Fielding.

The clerk referred to a paper, and said:

"The next witness, your worship, is the owner of the lace, whose name is Catherine Stretham."

"Let her be called, then."

Catherine Stretham was called, and in response to the summons, a middle-aged respectable-looking woman made her appearance in the witness-box.

She appeared to be in a fluster and excited condition.

The oath was duly administered, and then Mr. Fielding said:

"Is your name Catherine Stretham?"

"Yes, your worship, it is."

"Where do you live?"

"At number three hundred and fifty, Holborn Hill, your worship."

"Have you a husband?"

"No, sir, I am a widow."

"Are you in business?"

"Yes, your worship. I keep a shop on Holborn Hill, in which gold lace and other ornaments of a similar character are sold."

The magistrate made a sign to one of the police officers, who opened the tin box, and taking out the pieces of gold lace, handed it to Mrs. Stretham.

"Do you know that lace, Mrs. Stretham?"

"I do, your worship."

"Is it yours?"

"It is."

"Can you swear to it?"

"Most positively, your worship, because the card on which it is wrapped has my private mark upon it."

"What private mark?"

"One to signify what the lace cost, and the other to signify at what it should be sold."

"Then you swear to it without hesitation?"

"Yes, your worship."

The other pieces were then handed to the witness in

succession, and after examining them, she swore to the whole as her property.

"I believe also that the tin box is mine, but I cannot swear to it, because it appears to be much battered and covered with smoke and dirt, and the box which I lost was nearly a new one."

"And when was the lace last in your possession?"

"On the twenty-second of January, your worship."

"Do you know how, or by whom, the lace was stolen?"

"I don't, your worship. I only know that I had the box of lace on the afternoon of the twenty-second of January, because then I sold one piece of lace out of it, for the box originally contained twelve pieces."

"And when did you miss the lace?"

"The same night, your worship. As soon as I discovered my loss I searched everywhere for the box, but could not find it, and the next day I offered a reward. Here is the bill, your worship. It is dated January twenty-third, and that is how I know it was on the twenty-second of January that the lace was stolen, because the reward was offered on the following day."

"Very clear indeed," said the magistrate, as he looked at the bill handed to him, which was one offering a reward of ten pounds for the recovery of the lace.

"How much do you estimate the lace to be worth, Mrs. Stretham?"

"Fifty pounds, your worship."

"That will do," said Mr. Fielding. "I have no more questions to ask you. Your evidence is quite sufficient. Perhaps the prisoner may wish to say something?"

"I reserve my defence," said Wild, "until my trial."

Then, turning to Mrs. Stretham, he continued:

"Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, of course—you are Jonathan Wild."

"Exactly. Well, previous to the time when you offered the reward for your lace, did you ever see me in your shop?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Not to your knowledge? Of course that just means that you never have, because my pleasing face is one that everybody recollects."

Wild made one of his old hideous grins as he spoke.

"Have you no more questions to ask?" said the magistrate.

"None, your worship," returned Wild; "as I said a few minutes ago, I shall reserve my defence."

"And very wisely too. My duty is clear enough before me;—you stand committed to take your trial at the next Old Bailey sessions."

A murmur of voices arose from the body of the court as soon as the magistrate finished speaking.

Jonathan Wild was removed from the dock and taken into the next room.

Here he was allowed to take some refreshment, after which the handcuffs were placed upon him, and a strong force of police officers having assembled, he was led to the door of the court.

The hackney-coach in which he had been brought from Newgate was still standing before the door of the court.

The police officers had been compelled to surround it, and also to form a line from the door of the court, in order to keep off the crowd.

The news that Jonathan Wild was before the magistrate very quickly spread, and the consequence was that an immense mob had assembled.

All were anxious to catch just one glimpse of the prisoner.

As soon as the officers reached the door of the court the excitement of the crowd became intense.

When, however, Jonathan followed them, a succession of the most fearful howls came from their lips.

Hisses, too, arose; and one would think if any person was ever universally detested Jonathan Wild was that man.

He scowled fearfully when he caught sight of the excited throng, and when their cries of execration and contempt reached his ears.



[EDGORTH BESS IN THE CAVERN.]

The next moment he lowered his head, and suffered the police officers to lead him unresistingly to the hackney-coach, place him in it, and seat themselves beside him in the same manner as before.

Jonathan Wild submitted to this because he was so well aware that resistance was utterly useless.

He was only safe while surrounded and protected by the police officers; if he once got among the crowd, they would tear him piecemeal.

The other officers were still compelled to form a circle round the coach, while others with drawn cutlasses in their hands were obliged to march in a dense body before the horses' heads, and so clear the way before them.

Such being the case, their progress was of course very slow, but upon reaching Holborn the crowd became thinner and their speed was accelerated.

Upon gaining the top of Snow Hill, it was discovered that another mob had collected round the doors of New-

gate, and it was being swelled every second by fresh arrivals.

This crowd was to a great extent composed of the people who had stood outside Bow Street.

Finding it was useless to follow the coach, they had taken the nearest cut through the back streets, and, running at the top of their speed, had managed to arrive first.

In this way they hoped to have the double gratification of seeing the prisoner taken out of the coach and led up the steps into Newgate.

They were more orderly and behaved much better than the crowd which had assembled on the preceding day, and confined themselves to uttering groans, yells, and hisses.

Many of course were disappointed, but still a few saw Jonathan Wild descend from the coach and pass through the portals of the prison.

CHAPTER CXXLXXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD INSISTS UPON BEING FREED FROM HIS FETTERS, AND THE GOVERNOR MAKES A COMPROMISE.

UPON reaching the vestibule of Newgate, the thief-taker found that quite a large crowd of distinguished persons had collected and were waiting his arrival.

Among them were the sheriffs' men, who until within the last few days had believed Jonathan Wild to be a most efficient police officer, who studied the interests of the people at large more than he did his own.

Jonathan grinned derisively when he saw with what altered looks they regarded him, but he hung down his head and tried to conceal the expression of his face as much as possible, for he had made up his mind to one particular course.

He had resolved to adopt and maintain as far as possible an air of injured innocence, to curry favour with everybody in the best way he could, and to submit patiently and without resistance to anything that might be done.

As soon as it became known that the evidence given at Bow Street had been sufficient to warrant Mr. Fielding committing the prisoner to Newgate, the High-sheriff stepped forward, and addressing the Governor of the prison, said:

"Mr. Noakes, you will be held particularly responsible for the safe keeping of this prisoner. During the time you have held your present situation there have been several daring escapes from the prison. If another is made, you will find yourself in serious trouble."

"I thought, sir," said Mr. Noakes, humbly, "that I had shown to the satisfaction of everybody that it was not my fault the prisoner escaped."

"Well, we will say no more about the past, but I caution you with regard to the prisoner. In the first place, as a necessary precaution, you will put irons upon him and confine him in the strongest cell you have."

Jonathan Wild ground his teeth when he heard these words.

Mr. Noakes found his position growing more and more difficult and complicated every day.

He did not dare say "I will not put irons on the prisoner," and he scarcely dared to give the order for them to be brought, lest Jonathan Wild should say something unpleasant.

"We will wait here and see the irons riveted on," said the High-sheriff, "so call the smith at once."

Mr. Noakes had no other resource than to obey this order.

A turnkey was despatched to fetch the smith, as the man was called whose duty it was to put on and strike off the fetters from the limbs of the prisoners.

He came in with a bag of tools and a small portable anvil.

In his right hand he held a set of unusually heavy fetters, which he dragged along the stone floor of the prison after him, making a most horrible clanging din as he did so.

When the smith approached, Jonathan Wild felt for a moment as though inclined to resist.

He mastered the impulse, however, and without speaking a word, or replying in any way to what the smith said, he suffered the iron basils to be clasped around his ankles and secured there by a rivet.

A strong iron belt was padlocked round his waist, and the fetters were also locked upon his wrists.

When decorated with these little ornaments, Jonathan weighed about two hundred pounds heavier than before.

Jonathan Wild uttered no word of complaint, and made not the least resistance to the irons being placed upon him, and finally he was marched off and placed in the same dungeon that he had before occupied.

The sheriffs were so amazingly polite as to accompany him to his cell and see him placed in it, after which they withdrew, and Mr. Noakes at last had the satisfaction of getting rid of his distinguished visitors.

Scarcely had he closed the door behind them than one of the turnkeys touched him on the shoulder.

He turned round sharply.

"Well, Watson, was it?"

"Please, sir," said Watson, "Mr. Wild's a-kickin' up a row in his cell, and says he must see you!"

The Governor sighed as he said:

"I am coming!"

He followed the turnkey to the door of Mr. Wild's cell with a lagging step.

"Was ever a man in such a fix before?" he asked himself. "No, never! What am I to do? I can see the end of it—between the two stools I shall fall to the ground, and I wonder who'll care?—nobody—nobody; but I know plenty who would rejoice."

This was not at all a pleasing reflection, and the Governor felt very uncomfortable after he had made it.

Just then the door was opened, and he was ushered into the cell.

The prisoner was standing up in an angry attitude, with his back to the grated aperture which served for a window.

Mr. Noakes thought it highly probable that Wild would make some disagreeable speeches—speeches that he would not like to be overheard, so he said to Watson:

"You can leave me with the prisoner and go back to the vestibule; come back in a quarter of an hour."

"All right, sir!"

Mr. Noakes closed the door of the cell.

The first thing Wild did was to utter a string of curses. They were levelled at all the world in general, but at the High-sheriff and his colleagues in particular.

"Am I to pass the time between now and the commencement of the sessions in this fashion?" he roared. "Do you think I am going to submit to it—do you think I'll be manacled in this way?"

"Now, my dear Mr. Wild!" said the Governor.

"Oh, d—n your civility! Don't 'dear Mr. Wild' me—I don't want any of your politeness!"

"But what could I do? You must make some allowances."

"It's no good talking about the past," said Wild; "I don't intend to do it—my business is with the present and the future. You would tell me and wish me to believe that you would not have had these fetters put on me had you not been obliged to it."

"Exactly."

"Oh yes, I quite expected that! Well, now, we may as well save our breaths. One word is as good as a hundred. I insist upon being freed from these fetters!"

"Now, my dear Mr. Wild!" began the Governor again in the most soothing voice imaginable.

Jonathan interrupted him with a ferocious howl.

"I say I will have them taken off, and that at once!"

"It is impossible."

"I will see about that!"

"Now, do be reasonable!"

"Reasonable! How can I be reasonable with a couple of hundredweight of iron dragging me to the ground?"

"It is uncomfortable, I know."

"Uncomfortable! I only wish you'd got them on instead of me!"

"I daresay you do," said the Governor, with a grin.

"And if you don't have them taken off," continued Wild, with menacing voice and gesture, "you'll d—d soon find yourself accommodated with a set to match!"

The Governor's face assumed that yellow, sickly tint which it always did when Wild uttered his ambiguous threats.

"Do you hear what I say?" continued the thief-taker. "While you do as I want you, I shall keep my mouth shut; but I tell you, the minute you refuse I shall open my mouth, and the consequences will be on your own head!"

The Governor groaned and wrung his hands.

"But what can I do—what can I do?"

"Why, take off these fetters, as I command you."

"If I do, I shall lose my situation."

"If you don't, you will, and that very soon, I can promise you!"

"Alas, alas! this is a most unfortunate affair!"

"It is for me."

"And for me, Mr. Wild. You don't know what I suffer, and I dread to look into the future."

"Then take my advice, and don't do it."

"But can't we compromise this matter in some way?" asked Mr. Noakes, as a fresh thought darted into his mind; "can we not settle it in an amicable manner?"

"I don't care a d—n whether it is amicable or not, so long as these irons are off!"

The Governor rubbed his hands together.

"You know as well as I do, Mr. Wild, that I am only a

servant, and that I am bound to do as I am told. I dare not refuse what the sheriffs say. They have given orders about the irons, and if they were taken off without their permission I should get into serious trouble. Suppose they were to take it into their heads, as they very likely will, to come into this cell to pay you a visit—what do you think the consequences would be to me if they found you unfettered?"

"I don't want to get you into trouble, if I can help it," said Wild, more calmly than he had yet spoken; "but now you mention it, I think we can compromise matters, and arrange things so that they will turn out well for all parties."

"I should rejoice most heartily."

"Well, then, you must give me a key, so that I can unlock my fetters and take them off whenever I think proper."

"But—"

"Hear me out before you interrupt. You must contrive to give me a few minutes' notice when anyone is about to enter my cell. I shall then make all speed and put them on again, and who will be the wiser?"

"No one, Mr. Wild. You release my heart of quite a heavy load, you do. You shall have the key, and I hope, for your own sake as well as mine, that you will be careful."

"Depend upon it I will."

"If I was suddenly removed from my situation," said the Governor, whiningly, "it would prove a serious disadvantage to yourself, for in all probability my successor would not feel so disposed to render you what kindnesses he could as I am."

"It all depends," said Wild. "If I had got the same power over him as I had over you, it would not matter in the least; but you know very well I could have you hanged any day I liked."

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Wild; there may be somebody listening. Here is a key,—you will find it will unlock your fetters easily."

"Thanks!—and if you will only take care to let me have a little notice before anyone enters, I will give you my word that they shall not have the least suspicion of the little arrangement which exists between us."

With these words Mr. Noakes took his departure, and the thief-taker was once more left in his cell.

CHAPTER CCCCX.

THE MORNING APPOINTED FOR JONATHAN WILD'S TRIAL AT LENGTH ARRIVES.

JONATHAN WILD found the time pass slowly and unpleasantly enough in his cell, although he was able to disencumber himself of his fetters whenever he thought proper.

The sessions would commence at the Old Bailey in a couple of days, and would probably last three, and on one of the days Jonathan Wild would have to stand and take his trial upon the charge brought against him.

It was a rule then, as it is now, to try the unimportant cases first.

The thief-taker imagined that his was an important one, and upon making inquiries of Mr. Noakes, he learned that Friday was the day appointed.

After receiving this announcement, Jonathan deliberated a long time with himself as to what he should do.

He thought over the evidence that was likely to be brought against him, and weighed it carefully in his mind, in order that he might judge what likelihood there was of his escaping conviction.

Not a single circumstance escaped him, and after much thought he resolved to stand his trial, and not make an attempt to escape, as at first he intended.

It was just possible, he thought, that he might be clever enough to secure his acquittal, and if he was discharged, why, then he would be in a much better position than he would be if he was an escaped prisoner.

He was the more inclined to run the risk of being brought to trial because after the verdict was pronounced it would be just as easy for him to make his escape as it was then.

"Yes," he said, "I will take my trial—I will try what cleverness will effect. I have succeeded well hitherto in what I have undertaken, and have plenty of time for re-

flection, and it is odd to me if I don't outwit them. It would be a revenge indeed upon my enemies if I was released from custody."

Jonathan Wild was so pleased with this idea that he sat down and pondered for several hours.

At the end of that time he felt his determination strengthened, and his whole demeanour consequently underwent a most remarkable change.

Mr. Noakes was continually on the look-out for any alteration, and when he saw Wild suddenly become calm and quiet, he grew fidgety and anxious, for he knew very well it meant something.

He endeavoured on several occasions to enter into conversation with his prisoner, but he failed signally. Wild would have nothing to say to him.

On Wednesday the sessions commenced, and Mr. Noakes was too busy to pay much attention to his important prisoner.

When the Court rose, however, one of the turnkeys delivered a message to him, to the effect that Wild wanted him.

During the whole of that day, Jonathan Wild had been busily engaged in writing.

As soon as the Governor entered the cell, the thief-taker took up a rather large packet of papers from the table, and said:

"Mr. Noakes, I want this delivering with all speed and without fail to the address I have written on it. It is something I am going to have printed, so that when the printer brings the parcel you will know what it is, and you will let me have it."

"But it is against the regulations."

"I don't care for that. It must be done, without you like to take upon yourself the consequences of a refusal."

"Don't be harsh, Mr. Wild—it shall be done."

"Good!—that will do! And now be off—the sooner the packet is delivered the better."

"I will deliver it myself, and so make sure."

"It will very likely be best, and I should think it will be as well if you were to ask the printer when the job would be finished and the parcel ready,—you might then call and bring it to me without anyone being the wiser."

"That's precisely what I intended to do."

"Go on, then—you have my consent."

The Governor took his departure, and on the following day, towards evening, Jonathan received his parcel from the printer's.

He was well satisfied with it, and seemed to be in excellent spirits.

"I don't wish to make you downcast, Mr. Wild, but of course your case is very much talked about, and I can't help hearing a great deal that is said."

"What of it?"

"Everybody believes that things will go hard with you, the present Government having made up their minds to put you out of the way. The Attorney-General will conduct the case for the prosecution. Who shall you have for a counsel?"

"Myself!"

"Yourself?"

"Yes, and a good counsel I shall make, as you will find. I am not afraid but I shall be a match for the Attorney-General."

"Well, Mr. Wild, I heartily hope that you will, for nothing would delight me so much as to see you once more a free man."

"I should doubt you," said the thief-taker, "only I happen to know that I am more trouble to you inside the prison than I should be out."

"You are—you are indeed! I have not had one night's sleep since you have been here."

"That's no affair of mine. I am anxious for morning to come."

In a little while the Governor departed, and the thief-taker, throwing himself upon the hard mattress, gave himself up to reflection, and arranged in his own mind the details of the defence he should make.

The morning of his trial arrived.

He rose early, and washed and dressed himself as carefully as he was able.

He was bent upon making a favourable impression if he could.

The papers he had printed he caused to be distri-

buted among the jurymen and other persons in and round the court.

On the front page appeared the following words:—

"A list of persons discovered, apprehended, and convicted of several robberies on the highway, and also for burglary, housebreaking, and also returned from transportation, by Jonathan Wild."

The following pages contained the names of thirty-five for robbery on the highway, twenty-two for housebreaking, and ten for returning from transportation.

On the end of the list appeared the following words:—

"Several others have been also convicted for like crimes, but remembering not the persons' names who had been robbed, I omit the criminals' names. Please to observe that several others have also been convicted for shoplifting, picking of pockets, &c., by the female sex, which are capital crimes, and which are too tedious to be inserted here, and the prosecutors not willing of being exposed.

"In regard, therefore, of the numbers above convicted, some that have yet escaped justice are endeavouring to take away the life of the said Jonathan Wild."

These words closed this extraordinary production, but it is doubtful whether the circulation of this list produced the effect which Jonathan Wild expected it would.

Upon the hour for trial arriving, his fetters were knocked off, and he was taken to a part of the prison called the leads, where it was usual for prisoners to remain for a few moments until their names were called.

This was a place where many people connected with the business of the sessions were continually passing to and fro, and the thief-taker busied himself in giving to every person who would accept one, a copy of his list of persons convicted.

From where he stood he could hear distinctly a roaring sound in the street below.

He knew what it was.

It arose from the people who had assembled there, and who had been unable to gain admittance to the court.

It was already crowded, and the people were so densely packed together that it would have been a matter of impossibility to find room for one more.

Those on the outside were angry, tumultuous, and impatient, yet they resolved to remain where they were, in order to be the first to learn the issue of the great trial.

It might be said with every confidence and without the slightest exaggeration, that never before had a trial caused so great an amount of curiosity and interest in the public mind.

Jonathan Wild was as well known as King George himself. Although there were some who had obtained a partial insight into his proceedings, yet by far the larger portion of the population had looked upon him as a very energetic police officer, one who set an excellent example to the rest, for he appeared to devote the whole of his time to the capture of offenders against the community at large.

Now, however, when different facts connected with him became known, an entire revolution of feeling took place; he was loathed and detested by all persons, and yet they felt doubtful how the day's proceedings would terminate.

It caused Wild a certain amount of depression when he noticed that, of all those who passed him on the leads, not one paused to cast a friendly eye upon him.

"They fear me!" he exclaimed, mentally—"that is the reason, and they think now that they have the opportunity of getting rid of me and their fears together; but they will be mistaken. I know how things are managed inside the court better than most of them."

This was true, for Jonathan Wild had stood in the witness-box at the Old Bailey more times than he could well have counted.

It was some satisfaction to him when his papers were taken and perused, for many did take them, and read them from sheer curiosity.

The preparations within the court having been made, and the time for his case to be called on having arrived, a summons was given for him to take his stand in the dock.

A little winding staircase led up to the floor of the dock, and this Jonathan ascended in company with a couple of police officers.

In another second he found himself at the bar, with an indistinct mass of something before him.

CHAPTER CCCCXCI.

JONATHAN WILD PLEADS "NOT GUILTY" TO THE INDICTMENT.

Hisses and groans smote upon his ear, but, taking no notice of these demonstrations of dislike, the thief-taker made a kind of circular bow to the judge, jury, and to the whole court generally.

Then, raising his head, he folded his arms upon his breast, and looked with an air of defiant calmness around him.

The crier in court quickly succeeded in restoring silence, or, rather, the people themselves became still, because they were so anxious for the proceedings to commence.

Jonathan looked across the court at the judge, who, placing a pair of spectacles upon his nose, stared at him in return.

Then Wild looked at the jury-box, but the men who were seated in it avoided his gaze.

His eyes rested for a moment or two upon the table at which the Attorney-General sat.

A pile of papers was upon it, and several other barristers in their wigs and gowns were conversing earnestly with him.

Acquainted as he was with all the proceedings of the court, Jonathan Wild looked about him, and noted everything with as much interest—nay, even more than he would have done had he beheld them for the first time.

It must be borne in mind, however, that never before had he occupied the same position as he did then.

On previous occasions some other trembling wretch, brought up to hear his doom, stood where he stood then, while either he was a spectator, or else placed in the witness-box.

Silence having been obtained, the business of the court at once commenced.

The Clerk of Arraignment having fluttered the parchment upon which the indictment was written, in an imposing manner rose to his feet and commenced to read.

As is nearly always the case, little attention was paid to this portion of the ceremony.

The judge occupied himself in perusing a book, the jury nibbled the ends of their quill pens and tried to look wise, and the different barristers at the tables chatted and laughed over various subjects.

It was perhaps in consequence of his having found out what a little attention was paid to him, that the Clerk of Arraignment gabbled over what he had to read at a very rapid rate.

His voice was harsh and unintelligible,—the only words that were clearly heard in consequence of additional stress being laid upon them, were "said" and "aforesaid."

Having finished the perusal of this document, he dipped his pen in the ink, and, looking straight across to Jonathan Wild, said:

"Prisoner at the bar, do you plead guilty or not guilty to the charge preferred against you?"

"Not guilty!" said Wild, almost with a shout.

The plea was recorded, and then the Clerk of Arraignment sat down in his seat with a bang, amid an imposing rustle of parchment.

A change now took place in the appearance of every one, and the business of the court fairly commenced.

Divested of all legal technicalities, Wild was indicted for privately stealing in the house of Catherine Stretham, in the parish of St. Andrew's, Holborn, fifty yards of lace, the property of the said Catherine Stretham, on the 22nd of January last past.

"The Attorney-General prosecutes on behalf of the Crown?" said the judge.

"I do, my lord," said the Attorney-General, standing up for a moment and then sitting down again.

"Who appears on behalf of the prisoner?" continued the judge.

There was a silence, and none of the counsel moved.

Then in a clear voice Jonathan said:

"I am innocent of the charge made against me, and so, with the permission of your lordship, I will conduct my own case."

"You are quite free to do as you like in that respect."

"Thank you, my lord!" said Wild, with great apparent respect.

The Attorney-General then rose and spoke as follows:

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—To-day, as you are aware, there stands before us, at the bar of this court, a prisoner of more than ordinary interest.

"This is no other than Jonathan Wild, who has for such a long time past represented himself as one of his Majesty's police officers.

"In my address to you, gentlemen of the jury, it is not my intention to enter at great length into the details of the prisoner's life; on the contrary, I shall confine myself as closely as I can to the charge I have to prefer against him.

"Still, it will be necessary, in order that the charge should be fully comprehended, that I should enter into some statements and place certain facts before you; in doing which, I will promise to occupy no more of your valuable time than I am compelled.

"And now for the facts.

"With some trouble, the following information has been procured, and I have no hesitation in giving you my assurance that all the particulars are quite correct.

"First, then: It can be proved that for many years past the prisoner at the bar has been a confederate with great numbers of highwaymen, housebreakers, shoplifters, and other thieves.

"Secondly: That he has formed a kind of corporation of thieves, of which he has been, and indeed is, the head or direct; and that, notwithstanding his pretended services in detecting and prosecuting offenders, as ingeniously set forth by the prisoner in the pamphlet he has had so industriously circulated, it can be proved upon evidence that he procured such only to be hanged as concealed their booty or refused to share it with him.

"Thirdly: It is a matter of certainty that he divided the town and country into so many districts, and appointed distinct gangs for each, who regularly accounted to him for their robberies; he employed also a particular set to steal in churches at the time of divine service, and likewise other moving detachments to attend at Court on birthdays, balls, &c., and at both Houses of Parliament, circuits, and country fairs.

"Fourthly: That the persons employed by him are, or have been, for the most part felons convict, who had returned from transportation before the time for which they had been transported had expired, and that he made choice of them to be his agents because they could not be legal evidences against him, and because he had it in his power to take from them what part of the stolen goods he thought fit, and otherwise use them ill or hang them as he pleased.

"Fifthly: That he has from time to time supplied such convict felons with money and clothes, and lodged them in his own house, the better to conceal them, particularly some against whom there are now informations for the counterfeiting and diminishing of broad pieces and guineas.

"Sixthly: That he has not only been a receiver of stolen goods, as well as of writings of all kinds, for nearly fifteen years past, but has frequently been the confederate and robber along with the above-mentioned convict felons.

"Seventhly: That in order to carry on these malpractices, and to gain some credit with the ignorant multitude, he usually carried a short silver staff as a badge of authority from the Government, which he used to produce when he himself was concerned in robbing.

"Eighthly: That he has, or had, under his care and direction several warehouses for receiving and concealing stolen goods, and also a ship for carrying off jewels, watches, and other valuable goods to Holland, where he had a superannuated thief for his factor.

"Ninthly: That he has kept in his pay several artists to make alterations and transform watches, seals, snuff-boxes, rings, and other valuable things, that they might not be known; several of which he used to present to such persons as he thought might be of service to him.

"Tenthly: That he seldom, if ever, helped the owners to the notes and papers they had lost, unless he found them able to specify and describe them, and then often insisted on more than half the value.

"Lastly: It appears that he has often sold human blood by procuring false evidence to swear persons into facts they were not guilty of, sometimes to prevent them from being evidences against him, and at other times for the sake of the great reward given by the Government.

"These, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, are the startling facts which have been elicited with respect to Jonathan Wild, and, as I have previously said, I can vouch for the truth of all that I have put forward.

"There are other facts which I do not mention, simply because I am not so certain about them, so we will let them pass.

"The charge against the prisoner is that of having stolen, from the house of Mrs. Catherine Stretham, a quantity of gold lace, and that he did commit this felony, I think I shall be able to prove to the satisfaction of all parties present. As I have already occupied a great deal of your time, I shall refrain from giving an outline of the circumstances, as I at first intended to do, but will at once proceed to call the witnesses, and the testimony they will give I hope will suffice to make the whole case quite clear to your minds.

"In conclusion, I have to perform the duty of reminding you that the charge upon which the prisoner is arraigned is one that affects his life. If he is proved guilty of the felony with which he is charged, sentence of death will be pronounced upon him.

"Therefore, gentlemen of the jury, it behoves you to listen with serious attention to the whole of the evidence. By your verdict you can take this man's life away, but after having done so you cannot restore it to him."

The Attorney-General sat down.

Many persons were surprised by the temperate manner in which he had made his speech, and wondered what could be the cause of it.

It is quite certain, however, that all that he did say with so much earnestness produced a very great effect, probably much more than if he had declaimed violently against the prisoner, and dwelt upon the enormity of the crimes he had committed.

CHAPTER CCCCXII.

MR. HENRY KELLY IS EXAMINED BY THE JUNIOR COUNSEL, AND GIVES AN ACCOUNT OF THE ROBBERY ON HOLBORN HILL.

A JUNIOR counsel next rose.

He held a brief in his hand, to which he referred, and then said:

"Call Henry Kelly!"

"My lord," said Jonathan Wild, addressing the judge, "I wish to make a request."

"Speak."

"My lord, it is my intention, as I have before said, to defend myself. The charge against me is one which has been carefully got up by my enemies,—the tale they have to tell has been well drilled into them.

The judge interrupted him.

"You said you had a request to make. I cannot listen to any such statements as those you are now making. What is it you desire?"

"That the other witnesses, my lord, be ordered out of the court, and that no communication take place between them; I shall then have an opportunity of pointing out some glaring contradictions to your lordship, which I should not have if they were all in the court, because the one would swear to what the other had said."

"Your request is a reasonable one, and shall be granted."

The other witnesses were ordered from the court, and kept separate from each other.

Henry Kelly was placed in the witness-box.

His appearance was by no means prepossessing, for he seemed to be a terrible scoundrel.

His clothing was ragged and fitted him badly; his face had a sinister, brutal, and evil look; his hair was combed straight over his forehead, and cut quite level, leaving a small space between it and his eyebrows. At each side the hair was suffered to grow long, and upon these two locks he bestowed great care and attention, for as soon as he stood up in the witness-box he occupied himself by wetting his fingers with his lips, and then endeavouring to twist the harsh, wiry hair into a curl.

Wild knew the man well.

He was about the greatest villain and the most unmitigated scoundrel in the whole of his fraternity, which, seeing that the aforesaid fraternity was composed of all the ruffians in the kingdom, is saying a great deal.

Wild fixed his eyes upon this man, but Kelly would not

look towards the dock for fear of catching sight of the thief-taker.

Jonathan had much to fear from the disclosures which this man might make, but he preserved a calm countenance, and set his brain to work to think of some means by which he could upset what he said.

It was evident that the appearance of this witness did not create an impression in his favour.

The Attorney-General hastily wrote a few words on a slip of paper, and handed it to the junior who was about to examine this witness.

"What is your name?"

"Henry Kelly."

"You know, of course, why you are here to-day?"

"Yes, sir; in connection with the box of gold lace."

"Just so."

The tin box was now produced and handed to the witness, who was requested to examine it.

He did so, and then the junior counsel continued:

"Have you seen that box before?"

"Yes, sir; it has been bruised and battered about a great deal. I should not like to swear to it, but yet in my own mind I feel sure it is the same."

"Well, now tell the Court all that you know in connection with this tin box, and the gold lace which it contains."

"Well, sir, and you, my lord, I hope what I say won't be taken down and used agen me."

"No; you are permitted to stand there as a King's evidence."

"Many thanks, sir."

"Now proceed, and, in as few words as you can, tell the Court what you know about this matter."

"It was somewhere about the twenty-first of last January that I saw Mr. Wild at his house, and we had some conversation together."

"What was the nature of that conversation?"

"Well, sir," said Kelly, with a grin, "it was of a private nature, you see. I am a poor man, under pecoiliar circumstances. I was so unfortunate as to have sentence passed upon me for fourteen years' transportation; but I didn't like my quarters, and as I had the opportunity, I made my escape and came back to London."

"Go on; it will be best for you to make a clean breast of the whole affair."

"I will do so, sir—many thanks to you. I came back to London, but I hardly dared show my face. I tried to get work, but couldn't because I had no k'racker, and I was frightened to death for anybody to look at me, because I thought they would know who I was. I was well-nigh starving, when I happened to meet with Mr. Wild, and so he gave me employment."

"In what way?"

"He used to tell me where there was a chance of getting some booty. I was forced into thieving again, but Mr. Wild promised to keep me clear of all harm."

"And what consideration did Mr. Wild require for that?"

"Eh, sir?"

"I mean, what did you have to pay him for this information?"

"Why, sir, if I took him twenty pounds' worth of swag, he might perhaps give me two guineas."

"And did you agree to such a bargain as that?"

"I was obleeged, sir; I could do nothing else."

"And this frequently happened, I suppose?"

"Oh yes! Me and Mr. Wild was friends for a goodish bit."

"Well, now, what about the twenty-first of January?"

"I saw Mr. Wild on that day—or about that day. It might have been the nineteenth; I won't swear to the exact day. However, I called upon him at his house, and asked him if he could put me up to any little job, as I was very bad off, not having had anything to do lately."

"And what did Mr. Wild say?"

"He told me he knew of a capital chance, that would suit me exactly, provided I could get a woman to assist."

"Well?"

"I said I could get a woman who would help, and then Mr. Wild told me that he had heard from good authority that Mrs. Stretham, of Holborn Hill, was in the habit of keeping a considerable quantity of gold lace in her shop, and proposed that we should try to get some of it."

"What next?"

"I axed Mr. Wild which would be the best way to

manage the affair, and he said I should have to enter the shop with the woman, and pretend I wanted to purchase some lace, and take the opportunity of stealing some."

"And what part was Mr. Wild going to take in this transaction?"

"He was going to wait in the street, sir, just outside, in order to take all the swag we laid hold of, and to rescue us if we happened to be taken into custody. Mr. Wild is a very deep card—very!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, in the way he waited outside—because, if we had got out by ourselves and he hadn't seen us, we might have kept some lace, and only accounted to him for a portion of it."

"I see; that was a precaution he adopted." Then, turning to the jury, the junior counsel said:

"You see, gentlemen, that upon this point the evidence given by this witness quite bears out what has been stated to you."

Then, addressing Kelly, he said:

"We now want you to tell the Court what success you met with."

"Well, sir, I went into the shop along with a woman named Margaret Murphy, and pretended we wanted some lace. Mrs. Stretham, supposing us to be genuine customers, showed us a great deal; but we objected to all in some way or other, and left the shop without buying anything."

"And without taking anything?"

"Not 'zactly," said Kelly, with a satisfied chuckle at his own cleverness. "I took the opportunity to prig this ere tin box."

He put his hand on the article named as he spoke.

"Mrs. Stretham knew nothing about it, and we went out into the street."

"And was Mr. Wild waiting for you?"

"Yes; he came up to us in a moment, and asked for what we had got. I gave him the box, and he told us to call at his house in the course of an hour or two, and he would give us as much as he could."

"And did you go?"

"Yes, we went; and he said all he could afford to give was five guineas, which, after some objection, I took, because I couldn't get any more."

"And what did you do with the money?"

"I took three guineas and a crown for my share, and gave the rest to Margaret Murphy."

"And that settled the affair, I suppose? When did you hear any more about it?"

"Not till a few days ago, sir, when I was taken prisoner for being concerned in the robbery, and so was Margaret Murphy; but I was told if I came here into the witness-box, and made a clean breast of all from first to last, I should be held free from all trouble, and what I had done in the past should be overlooked."

"Very well—that will do. You can stand down, so far as I am concerned; but perhaps Mr. Wild has some questions to ask of you."

"Yes!" said the thief-taker, with such startling suddenness that it made Henry Kelly jump again. "I have got a few questions to ask, so the witness will please remain where he is for a little while."

Henry Kelly heaved a sigh, and stepped back into the witness-box.

He looked very uncomfortable, and he felt that the most disagreeable part of the business had yet to be gone through.

CHAPTER CCCCXIII.

CATHERINE STRETHAM'S EVIDENCE CONSIDERABLY DAMAGES WILD'S CASE.

DURING the investigation, so far as it had gone, Mr. Noakes had sat as usual in the little box-like place provided for his accommodation at the side of the dock.

Here he sat, the books and papers before him, but it was easy to see that he was in a very distressing state of mind.

Indeed, his perturbation was so great as to incapacitate him from performing his trifling duties.

He listened to every word that was uttered, feeling all the while as deeply interested as he possibly could have done had he been on his trial himself, and not his colleague, Jonathan Wild.

But although he listened with this intentness, he never once removed his eyes from the face and form of the thief-taker.

His gaze seemed fascinated.

It was but little that he was able to gather from the expression of Wild's countenance.

It remained perfectly inscrutable.

Of one thing, however, he was perfectly certain, and that was, that Mr. Wild was noting down every word uttered by the counsel and witnesses for the prosecution.

At last a moment came when Wild's face ceased to remain impassible.

Mr. Noakes noted the change, and understood perfectly well what it meant.

Jonathan's countenance had suddenly lighted up, and the Governor knew then that he had thought of something which would enable him to gain an advantage.

It was while Kelly was giving the latter part of his evidence that the thief-taker's countenance had lighted up in the manner we have described.

It was also clear to the Governor that Jonathan was doing his best to conceal from observation the satisfaction which he felt.

Poor Mr. Noakes, being aware how closely his own fate was mixed up in Wild's, wondered what this could be, and waited with great impatience in the hope that he should shortly hear.

He was not long kept in suspense.

Jonathan drew himself up to his full height when he announced his desire to question the witness, and his calm, defiant air much surprised those who were in the court.

He was perfectly collected.

Not a muscle wavered, and his voice was as steady as it was possible for a human voice to be.

"You have told the Court that your name is Henry Kelly," he began. "But that is not the name you have been convicted under, and you know it."

"Prisoner at the bar, you must conduct your cross-examination in a proper manner."

An angry reply rose to Wild's lips, but he suppressed it.

He was well aware that it would be extremely bad policy upon his part if he said anything to make the judge an enemy.

It was his most prudent and wisest course to conciliate him by every means that lay in his power.

"My lord," he said, "I was under the impression that I was conducting my cross-examination in a proper manner. I am sorry I am not, but you must not forget that I am not so calm as the other persons in the court, because I stand here on a charge that affects my life, and my enemies are as powerful as they are clever and unscrupulous."

This skilful appeal was not without its due effect.

Unpopular as he was, a faint hum of applause arose.

"Proceed, prisoner," said the judge, in a calmer voice. "I merely caution you."

Jonathan made a deep and most respectful bow.

Then, turning round to Kelly, he resumed his interrogation.

"You swear that I put you up to committing the robbery on Holborn Hill?"

"You know you did!"

"Do you swear to it?"

"Yes."

"That will do! That is just what I wanted! You swear that you and Margaret Murphy went inside the shop and stole the lace?"

"Yes!" said Kelly, eagerly.

"You swear to that?"

"I do."

"My lord," said the thief-taker, "might I presume so far as to call your lordship's attention to this statement? I shall want to refer to it by-and-by."

The judge wrote something down in his book.

Wild waited until he saw the pen cease to move, and then he continued:

"And you swear also that I was outside?"

"Yes."

"And where was I when you say you gave me the tin box?"

"Where?"

"Yes, where? At home?"

"No, in the street."

"In the street! I thought that was what you said, and you swear to it?"

"Oh yes!"

"You gave me the tin box containing the gold lace while I was standing in the street?"

"Yes."

"Then that is all the information I want from you, without, just for the satisfaction of his lordship and the gentlemen of the jury, you will say whereabouts in the street I was. Was it a mile from Mrs. Stretcham's?"

"No."

"How far, then? Five hundred yards?"

"It was about half a dozen houses off."

"Half a dozen houses off? That will do, and yet there is even one more question. By your own confession, you are a returned convict, and have committed numerous offences. Now, was not one of those offences the crime of perjury?"

Kelly was silent.

"Did you not swear away a man's life? Did you not stand in the witness-box, and take a solemn oath before God and man to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and did you not immediately utter statements that you knew perfectly well were false? Answer me that!"

"Ye—yes!" stammered Kelly.

"Now stand down."

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury, will you allow me to call your attention to these answers? Please bear in mind what he swears to, also that he admits having been convicted of the crime of perjury."

The junior counsel rose again and said:

"Call Margaret Murphy."

"Margaret Murphy!" cried the usher.

Considerable curiosity was manifested to catch sight of this witness.

Wild's cross-examination of Henry Kelly had been listened to with the most profound attention by all persons in the court.

Many were disappointed, for they had anticipated that Wild would attempt to confuse the witness in some way or other, instead of which he had simply called upon him to repeat what he had formerly said, and the most important admission appeared to be that he had been convicted of the crime of perjury.

The thief-taker's face wore a satisfied and triumphant expression, which, however, he tried hard to subdue.

All wondered at it, for they could not see what particular point he had gained in obtaining a repetition of the statements made by the witness.

A bustle at the door of the court now took place, and immediately afterwards Margaret Murphy was placed in the witness-box.

All eyes were turned towards her.

A more unprepossessing female could scarcely be imagined.

Her face was of a purplish red colour, and her cheeks and lips had an unpleasant, bloated appearance, while her eyes looked bleared and watery, as though she indulged very freely in spirituous liquors.

She made a succession of bobbing curtseys as soon as she was placed in the box, and she scarcely ceased while the crier administered the oath.

She kissed the greasy volume with a loud smack, as though she would show to the Court how emphatically she took the oath.

"Now, witness," said the junior counsel, "attend to me, if you please."

"Yes, your worship!"

"Don't 'worship' me, but just answer my questions! What is your name?"

"Margaret Murphy."

"Well, now, be good enough to turn round and look at that tin box at your side, and tell me whether you know anything about it."

Margaret Murphy glanced at the tin box and its contents, and turning round, nodded to the junior counsel.

"You know something about it, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then tell me all you know, in as few words as you can."

"This tin box, sir?—oh yes! But will what I say be taken down and used against me in evidence?"

"Certainly not. Speak out freely and openly, and then you will have nothing to fear."

"Well, sir, last Janniverry Henry Kelly he comes to me and 'Margaret Murphy,' sez he, 'are you willing to do an easy job and come in for a good share of swag?' To the which I made answer and said, 'I am,' sez I, and sez he, 'Mr. Wild has put me up to a very good thing, only I can't carry it out without you will help me.'"

"Very good; and did Henry Kelly tell you what this little job was?"

"Yes, sir; sez he, 'Do you know that gold-lace shop on Holborn Hill?' To the which I answered and said, sez I, 'The one as is kept by Mrs. Stretham?' 'Yes,' sez he, 'I know it,' sez I. 'That is the crib,' sez he. 'We are to go inside and pretend to buy something, and carry off whatever we can lay our hands on.'"

"And you consented to this proposal, and agreed to accompany him?"

"You're as good as a witch, sir; I did that same. I went into the shop along with Kelly, and while he was pretending to buy something, I slipped this here tin box under my shawl, and we walked out into the street without anyone being the wiser but ourselves."

"And what did you do then?"

"Outside the shop, a few houses off, was Mr. Wild, and I gave him the box, and he told us to go to his house that same night, and he would see what the box was worth, and give us the money."

"Is that all?"

"That is all, sir."

"Prisoner," said the judge, "do you wish to ask this witness any questions?"

"If you please, my lord."

"Proceed, then."

Wild turned to Margaret Murphy.

"You know me, of course?" he said.

"Yes—you are Mr. Wild."

"I am, and I know you; you call yourself Margaret Murphy, but that isn't your name."

Then, turning to the jury, Jonathan said:

"Gentlemen, if you will be kind enough to refer to the list of persons convicted which I have circulated this morning, you will find the witness's name among the rest, and it will show that she has been seven times convicted. She is one of the most daring thieves in London, and is no more to be believed on her oath than the last witness, as any police officer will tell you."

"You must question the witness," said the judge, "and not make statements."

"I beg your pardon, my lord," said Wild, humbly,—"I forgot!"

Then, addressing Margaret Murphy, he said:

"You are a clever woman, and I feel pretty sure you have been well drilled into what you are going to say, so I shan't attempt to make you contradict yourself,—I merely wish to know whether you swear positively and distinctly that you gave me the box of lace while I was standing in the street at some distance from Mrs. Stretham's shop. Is that right? Do you swear to that?"

"Yes, I do. It is the truth, and you know it!"

"Never mind that. You are sure there is no mistake? I was not in the shop with you, was I?"

"No, you were outside."

"That will do, then. I have no more questions to ask."

Margaret Murphy stepped out of the witness-box with great briskness.

She was heartily glad her part was over.

Jonathan Wild had not exaggerated her character, and she was executed about three years afterwards for stealing plate.

CHAPTER CCCCXCIV.

IN WHICH JONATHAN WILD MAKES A SPEECH FOR HIS DEFENCE.

CATHERINE STRETHAM was the next witness called.

Upon entering the box, the usual preliminaries were gone through, and she was requested to turn to the box of gold lace on the table at her side.

She looked at the contents, and swore positively that

the gold lace was her property; she also believed that the box was hers, but could not swear to it in consequence of its altered condition.

"Now, Mrs. Stretham," said the junior counsel, "be good enough to tell the Court the whole of the particulars connected with the loss of your property."

"It was between three and four o'clock on the afternoon of the 22nd of January last," commenced Mrs. Stretham, "that a man and a woman came into my shop, pretending that they wanted to purchase some lace. I showed them two or three parcels, to the quality and price of which they objected, and finally left the shop without making any purchase whatever. In about three or four hours after they left the shop I missed the box containing a quantity of lace, which is worth about fifty pounds."

"That will do," said the junior counsel,—"nothing could be more straightforward or simple."

"Do you wish to ask this witness any questions, prisoner?" said the judge.

"I do, my lord, if you will permit it."

"Say on—it is your right."

"Now, ma'am," said the thief-taker, turning to the witness-box,—"be good enough to take a good look at me!"

He put on a ferocious expression of countenance as he spoke.

"Now," he said, "do you know me?"

"I do,—you are Jonathan Wild!"

"Quite right! Now, I wish you to remember very particularly whether I ever came into your shop in the whole course of my life. Can you remember my having done so?"

"I cannot."

"Perhaps you would not mind swearing that I have not entered your house at all this year?"

"I will swear that," said Mrs. Stretham, "because I am quite sure you have not."

"Very well, then, that is all I wish to know."

"That is the case for the prosecution," said the Attorney-General, rising from his seat as Mrs. Stretham left the witness-box.

Everyone was now prepared to listen to the defence which Jonathan Wild was about to make.

Wild paused a moment.

Then, amid the breathless silence in the court, he spoke as follows:—

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—I stand here before you at the bar of this court on a charge of which if I am found guilty I shall have to expiate with my life.

"But, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, I am not guilty, and I trust I shall be able, without putting your patience to a very severe trial, to prove conclusively that I am innocent.

"I ask only that which I am sure to get from a jury composed of my fellow-countrymen—namely, a fair and impartial hearing.

"As all the world knows, for very many years past I have fulfilled the duties of police officer, in a more energetic and satisfactory manner than anyone else has ever done. I do not say this boastfully; and if it is doubted, I have only to refer you to one of the printed lists, which will prove the truth of what I say. In brief, I am the victim of a conspiracy, and one so artfully planned and carefully got up, that I am afraid innocence would stand but a poor chance of escaping the penalty which is due only to guilt.

"It was my misfortune to come under the notice of his Majesty's late Government, and the Secretary of State made use of me to perform several acts of a secret nature. I consented; not from any willingness on my part, but because I felt it was my duty, as an officer of the Crown, to obey the commands of those who were in a position superior to mine, and who would, I imagined, be responsible and answerable for what I did.

"To put it out of my power to betray any of the secrets with which I am acquainted, this prosecution has been got up against me.

"In my own mind I have not the slightest doubt that the two witnesses examined before you—namely, Henry Kelly and Margaret Murphy—were indeed and in truth guilty of the robbery of Mrs. Stretham's gold lace.

"Their evidence, so far as relates to the stealing of the lace, may, I think, be relied upon and considered as



[JONATHAN WILD COMPELS THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE TO ASSIST HIM TO ESCAPE.]

correct; but beyond that point all is farce. The tale about the delivery of the box to me, and my appointment with them, is a fiction, as also is the statement made by Kelly, who says that I instigated him to commit the crime.

"It would be easy to understand how any unscrupulous persons having the groundwork of a robbery to go upon would be able to add the little embellishments which I have mentioned, and which, if they could get a jury to believe them, would cause the conviction they very much desired to get me out of the way.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury, it is my hope and my belief that your brains are clear and your judgments clear. If they are you will not allow yourselves to be stultified by this spurious evidence. I repeat my assertion that I am innocent of the whole charge preferred against me; but, gentlemen of the jury, you will say that my assertion of innocence is not sufficient, and that a proof of it is required.

"Alas, I have no proof! It would be difficult to
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prove the correctness of many things; but there is one circumstance—one trifling thing which, in their damaging cleverness, the prosecution has overlooked—just such a one as one would imagine likely to be overlooked; for, gentlemen of the jury, I do not believe it possible for any human beings to get up a case against another human being with all the points, however so minute, being perfectly accurate—they are sure to overlook some trifling thing, or some trifling thing escapes their notice, which proves that the whole is false, and no more than a base conspiracy to deprive a fellow-creature of his life.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury, my profession is that of police officer or thief-taker, and in that capacity I have had many opportunities of seeing how business in this court is conducted, and it is for that reason that, feeling my innocence, I made so bold as to undertake my own defence, and to address you on the present occasion.

"But although I know something, I don't know all. I am not a lawyer, and therefore should not be able to avail

myself of various little facts so well as an experienced counsel would.

"In conclusion, for instance, I have something important—vitally important—to say, but I don't know how to say it."

Jonathan Wild passed.

The jury looked at each other, and wondered, now they had heard him speak, whether the prisoner really was guilty, as they had before believed him to be.

The judge, however, did not seem to be much impressed with Jonathan's remarks.

It was clear the judge had already arrived at a decision in the case.

He believed the prisoner to be guilty.

Upon hearing these last words spoken by the prisoner, he fixed his eyes upon him and said:

"Your life is at stake, and therefore all who have to decide upon your fate will listen with patience and attention to what remarks you have to make. What is it that you desire to say?"

"My lord, it is something upon which my fate hangs—it is the turning-point of this case; but I don't know how to bring it about; there is one means, but I am afraid that is irregular."

"What is it? Speak! If it is possible, it shall be done!"

"I am deeply indebted to your lordship. What I wished was, that the indictment recorded against me should be read, in order that I and the gentlemen of the jury should comprehend the exact charge against me."

"There is no obstacle to reading that portion of the indictment. It shall be done."

"Many thanks, my lord. Now I shall be able to make my innocence apparent."

At a sign from the judge, the Clerk of Arraignment rose with the parchment on which the indictment against him was written, in his hand.

All in the court seemed to hold their breaths, so full of suspense did they feel to know what would be the important fact which Jonathan Wild desired to elicit.

"Prisoner at the bar," said the Clerk of Arraignment, "the indictment against you is to the effect that on the twenty-second of January last you did privately steal in the house of Catherine Stretham, in the parish of Saint Andrew's, Holborn, fifty yards of gold lace, the property of the said Catherine Stretham, the value of which is fifty pounds."

The thief-taker's countenance flushed with triumph.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury," he said, speaking in a much louder tone than he had hitherto done, "you hear that the indictment charges me with stealing that tin box containing the gold lace."

"But, gentlemen of the jury, you will see at a glance that the charge against me falls to the ground. I am not guilty of this robbery, and it has been proved to you in evidence."

"The witness, Margaret Murphy, swears that she stole the box of gold lace, and that at the time when she stole it the only persons who were in the shop besides herself were Henry Kelly and Mrs. Stretham."

"How, then, can I be guilty of privately stealing in the house of Catherine Stretham? That lady has sworn to you that never to her knowledge have I stood in her shop at all."

"Gentlemen of the jury, this is often the case when false charges are brought against a man—something or other is sure to turn up and destroy their plan entirely."

"As I remarked a little while ago, I have no doubt that, in confessing to the robbery of the gold lace, the two witnesses Kelly and Murphy spoke nothing but the truth. What I say is this, even if the box was delivered to me in the street—but it was not—still, if it was, I should not be guilty of the charge of privately stealing in the dwelling-house of Catherine Stretham!"

CHAPTER CCCXC.

SENTENCE OF DEATH IS PASSED UPON JONATHAN WILD.

MANY a lawyer seated in the court looked with admiring eyes upon Jonathan Wild during the time he was making this speech for his defence.

They were amazed at the cleverness which he had displayed, and could not help confessing to themselves that, trained as they had been to the legal profession, they could

not have seized upon a flaw in the indictment with more skill and effect than he did.

A decided effect was produced.

The statements which Jonathan Wild had put forth could not be gainsaid. The evidence was as clear as noon-day, that, let the prisoner have been guilty of what crimes he may, he certainly had not committed a robbery in the house of Catherine Stretham.

The expression of the judge's countenance showed how much astonished he was, and he turned over his notes hastily in order to conceal his confusion.

There was but one course open for his adoption, so he commenced summing up as follows:—

"Gentlemen of the jury,—You have heard, and no doubt have weighed well, the peculiar evidence which has been laid before you relating to this extraordinary case."

"That the lace was stolen is certain, and by the confession of one of the witnesses we know who it was that actually committed the act."

"In my opinion the guilt of the prisoner is a point beyond all dispute, but as a similar case to the present one is not to be found in any law books, it becomes my duty to act with great caution. It is clear that the prisoner cannot be legally convicted, because the indictment positively expresses that he stole the lace in the house, whereas it has been proved in evidence that he was at a considerable distance when the act was committed. It is possible that he may have been liable to conviction as an accessory before the fact, or guilty of receiving the property knowing it to be stolen, but he cannot be deemed guilty of a capital felony unless the indictment declare, as the act directs, that he did assist, command, or hire."

"Gentlemen of the jury, under these circumstances, as the life of a fellow-creature is at stake, I cannot do otherwise than recommend the prisoner to your mercy."

The judge ceased, and the jury consulted eagerly together.

Great confusion now prevailed in the court; everyone seemed to have something to say.

But the thief-taker himself was not more rejoiced at the turn which affairs had taken than was Mr. Noakes, the governor of the prison.

He leaned back in his chair with a smile of complacency and content on his face.

At last, as he fancied, he saw the way out of all those difficulties which had troubled him. Jonathan Wild would be brought in not guilty; he was almost sure of that after the manner in which the judge had summed up—he would be set at liberty, and then he would have no further trouble.

Jonathan drew himself up to his full height, and looked proudly and defiantly around him. His gaze was particularly concentrated upon the jury-box.

The twelve men seated there were busily engaged in chatting to each other, and though the case appeared so clear, there was evidently some diversity of opinion among them.

At last they all seated themselves properly, and silence having been restored, the Clerk of Arraignment rose and put the usual question:

"Gentlemen of the jury, are you agreed upon your verdict?"

The foreman rose and replied:

"We are."

"Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

Amid an intense stillness the foreman replied:

"Not guilty."

A loud cry of triumph came from the lips of the thief-taker when he heard the words pronounced; he could not repress it, although he felt almost certain what the verdict of the jury would be.

He imagined now that all was clear, and that all he had to do was to go through a few forms and receive his liberty.

But his exultation received a sudden check.

Order was demanded, and then the judge said:

"Prisoner at the bar, a jury composed of your own countrymen have brought you in not guilty of the charge preferred against you in the indictment. It is with considerable reluctance that I admit the justice of that verdict; they could not do otherwise than bring you in not guilty. By the expression of your face, I can tell you imagine you have gained a great victory, and that now no obstacle intervenes between you and liberty; but there is

another indictment against you, upon which you will stand to take your trial to-morrow; if you can prove yourself not guilty of that, then you will be set at liberty."

Jonathan's jaw fell, and so did the Governor's.

Their faces assumed a totally different expression to what they had worn a moment ago, and Jonathan Wild, as he clutched the front of the dock convulsively, wished from the bottom of his heart that it was the judge's throat that he had got such a firm hold of.

He made several attempts to speak, and some time elapsed before he was successful.

Then he said:

"My lord, I imagined that this was the sole charge against me, but I perceive now that my persecutors—not prosecutors—are determined to carry their point at all risks. I did not know there was a second indictment against me, and consequently I had not prepared any defence."

"The nature of the indictment shall be explained to you," replied the judge, "and you will have the time between now and the opening of the court to-morrow to prepare your defence."

"What is the nature, then, of this second indictment?"

"You are charged with receiving money from Catherine Stretham under the pretence of restoring to her the property that had been stolen."

Upon hearing these words, Jonathan's countenance brightened.

"And is that the only other charge you have against me?" he asked.

"It is."

"And if I prove myself not guilty of that, shall I be set at liberty?"

"Certainly."

"Then I wish you would try me now, and save me the disagreeableness of passing another night in a Newgate cell."

His confident tone amazed all, and the general impression was that he would get off.

"Your trial stands adjourned until the opening of the court to-morrow morning," said the judge, calmly.

"Many thanks, your lordship—I am much obliged to you for the forbearance which you have shown to me, and I am sorry that you should be impressed with the notion that I am guilty. I repeat again, I am the victim of a base conspiracy."

Jonathan was then removed from the dock, and as the day was almost gone, the business of the court was adjourned until the morrow.

It was, however, with a light elastic tread that Jonathan Wild descended the steps leading from the floor of the dock, and accompanied the turnkeys to the door of his cell.

He entered, and the door was closed behind him, but he cared not—his heart was elate with victory.

"I knew I should triumph," he said, with a chuckling laugh, as he paced rapidly up and down his cell. "I shall yet rise above my enemies, and cover them with confusion. After this affair my power will be greater than ever; people will be afraid to attack me. Ah yes! desperate as the affair once looked, I am now convinced that everything will turn out for the best."

The thief-taker was too excited to remain still.

"Bah!" he said, "the charge which they are going to bring against me to-morrow is utterly beneath my contempt—I despise it, and it shows to what shifts they are driven, or else they would never attempt to obtain my conviction upon such a paltry charge."

Later in the evening, the Governor of Newgate paid his prisoner a visit.

He found him in better spirits than ever, and Mr. Noakes himself was quite overjoyed.

"Let me congratulate you, my dear Mr. Wild," he said, as soon as he entered the cell,—"let me congratulate you upon the signal victory which you have this day obtained over your foes; their defeat is utter—complete!"

"It is," said the thief-taker, with triumphant joy, "and to-morrow will but serve to witness a victory more signal still."

"I rejoice to hear you say as much, Mr. Wild. I have great faith in you, and more now than ever. I hope this will be the last night in Newgate."

"So do I, though I comprehend full well why you say it."

"Don't be unjust, Mr. Wild—don't be unjust. I have behaved towards you as well as I have been able, and I am sure your wishes and my hopes coincide."

"Yes—I shall be free to-morrow," said Wild—"never fear for that; and even if the offence is proved, it is not a capital offence; I shall only receive some light punishment. But it will not be proved; after surmounting such difficulties as I have to-day, is it likely that I shall be overcome by something which, in comparison, is insignificant?"

"I don't think it at all likely, and feel more certain than ever that to-morrow will see you a free man and with liberty to go wherever you choose."

"I feel so too."

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Wild—is there nothing you wish? I am entirely at your commands."

"No, no—there is nothing," returned the thief-taker, "without you can send me some substantial meal. I don't feel in want of food, but still it is necessary that I should appear before my enemies fresh and vigorous."

"It would be much the best."

"Then bring me in a good supper—that is all I require. In a few days, Mr. Noakes, I shall be able to reward you for the kindness and consideration you have shown."

The Governor and Jonathan seemed inclined to be on mighty good terms with each other, and when they separated their ugly countenances were quite radiant with smiles.

Jonathan Wild made an alarming supper and drank a great quantity, but no effect seemed to be produced upon him.

Never in the whole course of his life had he been in such a state of feverish excitement.

He lay down on the couch, but could only obtain a little sleep—his brain was by far too active.

To his infinite relief, morning came at length.

"A few hours now," he said, "will see me at liberty. I shall be free to carry on those schemes and work out those plans which I had conceived and resolved to execute. I shall be free to adopt such measures as will bring me a full revenge upon all my foes. Not one shall escape. All shall suffer—all shall rue the hour when they opposed themselves to me and tried to bring me to death!"

"This charge is a ridiculous one—it has never been preferred against anybody, and if it is proved, they would do nothing that will distress me; at the worst, they may sentence me to a few months' imprisonment, and if they do that, well then I shall have all the more favourable opportunity for thinking over the means by which I can carry out my revenge."

CHAPTER CCCCXCVI.

JONATHAN WILD TAKES HIS TRIAL UPON THE SECOND INDICTMENT.

JUST before the hour for opening the court arrived, a fresh thought recurred to Jonathan Wild, which caused him very great uneasiness.

How it was he could scarcely tell, but his thoughts went back to that time when he had the interview with Lord Ingestre concerning the diamond necklace.

The words which his lordship had uttered when he had handed over to the thief-taker such a large sum of money came forcibly back to him.

The reader will probably remember that the nobleman in question expressed a great amount of dissatisfaction at the existing state of the law.

He had announced his intention of having the subject brought before Parliament, in order that he might try to put an end to such iniquitous traffic between thieves and the thief-takers.

Whether his lordship had carried out his threat—whether the law had recently been altered—Jonathan Wild did not know, but he could not help thinking that if the alteration had been made, his position was a thousand times more dangerous than he had imagined it to be.

The more he thought over this subject, the more unpleasant and alarming did it become, and he ended at last by heartily wishing that he had not been so confident in his own powers as he had been, but that he had taken the opportunity of the preceding night to make his escape from the prison.

It was too late for that now, however; he had chosen to stand his ground, and it was too late to commence—every instant he expected to receive the summons to proceed to the court.

He remembered, too, that a change in Government had taken place, and that the officials connected with it were not at all in his power, and there was no knowing what lengths they might have gone to in order to get the law altered.

Jonathan worked himself up into a very uncomfortable state of mind.

All his confidence was destroyed, and he looked forward to the trial with feelings of great suspense and dread.

The noise produced by the removal of the fastenings of his cell door roused him from the kind of reverie into which he had fallen.

Raising his head, he saw that it was his old friend the Governor who had just entered.

At the same time he perceived that the expression of Mr. Noakes's face had undergone an alteration as complete as his own.

Starting to his feet, he exclaimed suddenly:

"Something is amiss—what is it? Speak out at once—what has happened?"

"Nothing—nothing," returned the Governor, nervously—
"at least, nothing of any moment."

"Then why do you look like that? You have heard some bad news. Make haste and let me know what it is!"

"I have received a few hints, Mr. Wild—very disagreeable hints—and the reason I have come here is in order to make you acquainted with them. I don't know whether there is any real cause for alarm. I hope there is not."

"Speak out!—don't talk in that roundabout fashion!"

"Well, then, I have heard—but I don't know how true it is—that some new or special Act of Parliament has been framed, or some clause added to an existing act, in order to meet your case."

"I dreaded as much—I have feared it nearly all the morning. Why did you not tell me this last night?"

"I did not know it until a few minutes ago, and as soon as I received the intelligence, I hastened to tell it to you."

"Thanks—thanks! but this has quite unsettled me. But I will not be cast down. Difficult as my position seems to be, I don't consider it so perilous as it was yesterday, and it may be that I shall be equally successful."

"Have you prepared your defence?"

"I have arranged a general outline of what I shall say, but I can't tell what alterations it may be subject to—things may take a different turn to what I expect. I shall be on the look-out, as I was yesterday, in order to avail myself of any little thing which may turn up likely to prove to my advantage."

"I should not suffer this intelligence to trouble me so much," said Mr. Noakes, after a pause. "I think we have both alarmed ourselves unnecessarily. However, I will go back, and if I can learn anything further about this matter, you shall be immediately acquainted with it without delay."

"How long will it be before the court opens?"

"A quarter of an hour at the outside."

The Governor departed, and Wild assumed an attitude of the deepest reflection.

The more he thought, however, and the better he recollected Lord Ingersire's manner when he paid the money for the restoration of the diamond necklace, the more convinced he became that the law had been altered.

"Perhaps," he murmured, "they have framed a clause so as to make it a capital offence. I fancy it must be, or they would never have taken the trouble upon this second indictment. Ah well, it is no matter! I am prepared for the worst, and if I can come off best in the contest, why then there will be all the more honour and credit due to my abilities."

In less than a quarter of an hour the turnkeys entered the cell and led the prisoner to the court.

As before, he had to wait some time upon the leads before his name was called, and, as on the preceding morning, he occupied himself in distributing the pamphlets he had had printed.

They were in more active demand than before—nearly everyone seemed anxious to possess one.

Jonathan Wild did not think the reason was because

they looked upon him as a doomed man, and wished to preserve some relic of so extraordinary a criminal.

Foolish as it may seem, this desire upon the part of the people to possess his tract put Wild in better spirits, and he began to return to his original frame of mind, and to think that after all he would get off.

At last his name was called out, but long before this happened he had given away every pamphlet he had left.

Once more he resumed his old place in the dock.

Once more he looked around him at the mass of people. But he did not feel half so interested as he had done; the novelty of the thing had worn off.

With some difficulty silence was obtained, and then, as the jury had already been sworn, and as the judge had taken his seat, the case was at once proceeded with.

The chaplain of the prison, the Lord Mayor, and two of the sheriffs took their seats upon the bench beside the judge, and when he perceived this, Jonathan was aware that it was expected that day's proceedings would be of a very interesting character indeed.

In the same gabbling voice as before, the Clerk of Arraignment rose and read over the second indictment.

Jonathan strained his ears to the utmost, and strove to catch every syllable, and though he to some extent succeeded, he was so confused with the mass of legal jargon with which the indictment was overwhelmed that he found himself unable to comprehend the true spirit of it.

As on the previous day, he pleaded not guilty in a loud voice when the question was put to him by the Clerk of Arraignment.

With the deepest interest and curiosity Wild looked forward for the counsel for the prosecution to commence his speech. That and that alone would enable him to come to a correct conclusion as regarded his position.

He was not kept long in suspense, for the Attorney-General rose and spoke as follows:—

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—This second indictment against the prisoner at the bar is one of a peculiar nature, and I shall have to request that you will pay more than usual attention to my statement of facts."

"I shall confine myself to the same course of action that I adopted yesterday; that is to say, I shall not make a speech for the mere sake of displaying my powers of oratory, nor shall I dwell in a vague manner upon the enormity of the crimes which the prisoner has committed, and which have nothing to do with the case now under consideration. I shall simply confine myself to a recapitulation of hard facts. It will be necessary for you to treasure them up in your memory, and when the time comes for the prisoner to defend himself, you will have to decide whether he disproves those facts or not."

"In the first place, as to the nature of the offence."

"The prisoner is charged with taking a reward from Mrs. Catherine Stretham, under the pretence of restoring to her possession the box of gold lace which had been stolen from her."

"This indictment is framed upon an Act of Parliament which has recently been passed."

"You must understand, gentlemen of the jury, that I made some statements yesterday with respect to the proceedings of the prisoner at the bar."

"For very many years past he has carried on a large trade, the nature of which, though scandalous to a degree, has been highly profitable to him."

"To such an extent did he carry these practices that it was deemed advisable to draw up a fresh Act of Parliament, simply with a view to meet his case, of causing him to be punished, and to serve to deter other people from following in his footsteps."

"And now to give you an idea of the manner in which Jonathan Wild carried on his business while pretending to be a police officer and an apprehender of thieves."

"In his employ he had numerous men who committed robberies of every description. These men were all more or less in his power, and frequently so situated that they could not give any evidence against him whatever."

"These men would go out night after night upon plundering expeditions, and such booty as they managed to obtain they brought to the prisoner at the bar, who, receiving it, paid them a certain amount, and the next day proceeded to negotiate with the people who had lost their property, and inform them in what manner they might get it back."

"To make this quite clear, I will give you a case in point."

CHAPTER CCCCXOVII.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS THE STATEMENTS MADE BY THE COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION EXCEEDINGLY DISAGREEABLE.

THE counsel for the prosecution paused a moment, and then resumed :

"The wife of a nobleman happening to be at a ball or party, discovered, when the time came for her to leave, that she had lost a diamond necklace of great value.

"She could not remember how or when she had lost it, but an immediate alarm was raised, close search was made, but not a trace of the missing necklace could be seen.

"One of Jonathan Wild's emissaries, known by the nickname of Pinching Tom, has confessed that he stole the necklace in question. Within a few hours after he had obtained possession of it, he went to Jonathan Wild's house, in Newgate Street, and offered it to him.

"Jonathan took the necklace, and offered Pinching Tom fifty pounds for it.

"As the necklace was composed of diamonds, and worth between four and five thousand pounds, the thief thought this sum too small, but offered to be content if Wild would give him one hundred pounds.

"This sum was refused, and he demanded the necklace back again.

"But Jonathan Wild refused to deliver it, and having asked him whether he would take fifty pounds, and having been replied to in the negative, he caused Pinching Tom to be imprisoned in one of the cells beneath his house, from which he did not release him for some time, and when the cell door was opened Pinching Tom was only too glad to escape with his life; and so you see, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, Jonathan Wild got this very valuable diamond necklace for nothing.

"And now the next thing I have to tell you is what Jonathan did with it—how he acted, and what money he made by the transaction.

"A short time afterwards, the nobleman whose wife the necklace belonged to was persuaded to go to Jonathan Wild.

"He did so, and although it is quite certain that at that very moment the prisoner at the bar had the diamond necklace in his possession, yet he pretended to know nothing about it, but very artfully said he would make inquiries, and, if he possibly could, would recover possession of the jewel.

"Jonathan Wild represented to the nobleman that the man who had stolen the necklace was doubtless somewhere quite safe, and would not feel inclined to part with the article unless he received something very handsome in return.

"In short, he told the nobleman that if he persisted in bringing the thief to justice, he would never see his diamond necklace any more; but if he was willing to offer a reward for it, and ask no questions, why then it was possible the necklace might be recovered.

"After a lengthened conversation, the nobleman reluctantly consented to adopt this course, and his reasons for doing so were not on account of the value of the article itself, but because it had been in the possession of his family for many generations, and he did not wish to part with it.

"And now comes the most astounding part of the business. You will scarcely believe what sum Jonathan Wild proposed that the nobleman should offer for the return of the necklace.

"That amount was no less than three thousand pounds.

"Gentlemen of the jury, you may well start upon receiving such an announcement as that,—it is nevertheless true.

"The behaviour of the prisoner has been described by this nobleman as artful to a degree.

"He pretended that he did not know whether he should be able to obtain the necklace at all—whether the holder of it would feel disposed to surrender it for the sum of three thousand pounds. He said that he would try his best, and would offer the reward.

"Now, all this while the audacious prisoner had the diamond necklace in his possession—perhaps it was in his coat pocket, and very likely his hand was upon it several times during the conversation.

"In order not to excite suspicion, this nobleman had to call repeatedly at the thief-taker's residence.

"On each occasion he was told that the reward for the recovery of the necklace had been offered, but had produced no effect.

"At last he was informed that the necklace had been recovered, and Jonathan restored it to him, with the assurance that he had been compelled to pay every penny of the three thousand pounds to the man who had stolen the necklace, or rather to an intermediate agent that the thief had employed.

"Thus, you see, the nobleman had no other resource but to give Jonathan Wild the three thousand pounds, and receive his necklace in return; and then—if I may so speak about so serious a matter—the cream of the joke was that Jonathan Wild represented he had not only been at great trouble and personal inconvenience himself in the matter, but had also been at some expense in bribing different people, and had lost a great deal of his own time. For these services he professed himself unwilling to make any charge, but added, he should be quite content to leave the affair to the generosity of his noble patron; and so Jonathan Wild netted something extra, over and above the three thousand pounds.

"Now, that will give you an idea of the manner in which Jonathan Wild has carried on his business, and he must have amassed an immense sum of money in this way.

"As may be supposed, the nobleman of whom I have been speaking felt much exasperated to think he should have to pay so dearly for his necklace, and to think he should also be obliged to encourage thieving in such a manner, and he resolved to bring the matter before the Legislature.

"He has done so, and the result is an Act of Parliament, from which I will now read one clause that applies to the particular case under investigation."

The counsel for the prosecution took up a book, and read as follows:—

"And whereas there are certain persons who have secret acquaintance with felons, and who make it their business to help persons to their stolen goods, and by that means gain money from them, which is divided between them and the felons, whereby they greatly encourage such offenders: Be it enacted, by the authority aforesaid, that whenever any person taketh money or reward, directly or indirectly, under pretence or upon account of helping any person or persons to any stolen goods or chattels, every such person so taking money or reward as aforesaid (unless such person apprehend, or cause to be apprehended, such felon who stole the same, and give evidence against him) shall be guilty of felony according to the nature of the felony committed in stealing such goods, and in such and the same manner as any such offender had stolen such goods and chattels, and in the manner and with such circumstances as the same were stolen."

The counsel closed the book.

"You see, gentlemen of the jury," he said, "that this clause was expressly framed in order to bring to justice such offenders as the prisoner at the bar.

"It will be proved before you in evidence that Jonathan Wild received from Catherine Stretham certain sums of money upon the pretext of getting back the lace which had been stolen from her shop.

"I shall be able to conclusively prove that the prisoner at the bar had secret acquaintance with felons—that he made it his business to help persons to regain their stolen goods, and, instead of bringing the thieves to justice, shared with them the money thus obtained.

"If, then, gentlemen of the jury, you find that the prisoner at the bar has been guilty of thus proceeding, it will amount to a felony, and you will have to give your verdict accordingly. I need scarcely remind you that it is your duty to weigh the evidence most carefully, for if the prisoner is found guilty, sentence of death will be passed upon him."

The Attorney-General sat down, and the same junior counsel rose to examine the witnesses.

During this speech, and during the reading of the

clause from the Act of Parliament, Jonathan Wild had felt exceedingly uncomfortable.

He saw that he would have the greatest difficulty in rebutting this charge; still he did not despair of doing so, although as yet he had not been able to detect any flaw, as he had done on the former occasion.

He listened to the account given by the counsel of the loss and recovery of the diamond necklace, and wished most heartily that he had never seen it.

Very little time was allowed him for reflection, however.

He was compelled to take notice of all that was going on around him, and, without making any pause, the junior counsel cried out:

"Call Mrs. Stretham!"

CHAPTER CCCCXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD DOES NOT EFFECT MUCH GOOD BY HIS CROSS-EXAMINATION OF MRS. STRETHAM.

MRS. STRETHAM was once more placed in the witness-box, and the oath was administered to her.

She was very pale, and her whole manner betrayed the greatest agitation.

No one could wonder at it, for she knew full well that the words she spoke would cause a fellow-creature to be doomed to death.

This was by no means a pleasant thought for her to have; and had the matter rested with her, Jonathan Wild would have got out of his trouble easily.

"Is your name Catherine Stretham?" asked the junior counsel.

"It is."

"On the twenty-second of January last, a tin box containing gold lace was stolen from you, under circumstances which you described yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, that is quite right."

"Well, now, I want you to inform the Court what you did—what steps you took upon discovering that the lace had been stolen."

Mrs. Stretham hesitated, and seemed very disinclined to speak.

"You have taken an oath," said the junior counsel, "to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and it is your duty to abide by the oath that you have taken, therefore I again wish you to tell the Court what steps you took after you discovered the robbery."

"It was not until the shop was shut up that I found the lace had been stolen, and how I came to discover it then was in consequence of a habit I have of going over the different things in my shop, in order to make sure everything is correct before locking up."

"Well, what did you do?"

"I was much put about, as you may think, for I am a poor woman, and have only the shop to depend upon, and the loss of fifty pounds' worth of gold lace was more than I could bear. I tried to think what had become of it and when I saw it last, and then I remembered the two people who had come into the shop, and at once came to the conclusion that they were guilty."

"Go on, please."

"I asked my neighbours what I had better do, and they advised me to go to a printer, and have a bill issued offering a reward of ten pounds for the recovery of the lace. This I did the following morning—the bills were distributed."

"It produced no effect. No one made any inquiries about it, and so I asked my neighbours what I should do next."

"And what did they advise you to do this time?"

"Some one thing and some another, but most said that the best thing I could do would be to go to Jonathan Wild, who lived in Newgate Street, and who was very clever in recovering property that had been stolen."

"And did you follow this advice?"

"Yes—I went to Mr. Wild's house, and saw him. I told him my business, and described as well as I could the personal appearance of those I imagined had been guilty of the theft."

"And now be careful—please to tell the Court what Jonathan Wild said."

"He asked me whether I had offered a reward, and I told him yes. He then wanted to know the amount, and I told him ten pounds. Upon hearing this, he shook his head and said it was not enough. I told him I was very anxious to recover possession of my property, and said I would not mind offering a still larger reward to get the lace back if he thought I stood the least chance of doing so."

"Continue, please."

Mrs. Stretham paused every now and then, and it was clear to all the persons in the court that she was giving her evidence with very great reluctance.

"He advised me to offer a reward of fifteen guineas, with the condition that if the lace was returned no questions were to be asked, and I was to rest satisfied. The great desire I had to diminish my loss as much as possible caused me to consent to these terms, and accordingly I offered a reward of fifteen guineas."

"He promised to do his best to assist me, and said he would make every inquiry. Finally, he told me to call upon him again in the course of two or three days, when he hoped he should have some satisfactory information to give me."

"You went, of course?"

"Yes, I went, and he told me he had learned something about my goods, and expected more particular information in a short time. During this conversation we were joined by a man who said he had reason to suspect that one Kelly, who had been tried for circulating plated shillings, was concerned in stealing the lace. Mr. Wild then stated that the chief obstacle in getting back my goods was the smallness of the reward. I told him I was poor, but yet I so much desired to get my lace back again that I said I would not mind giving twenty guineas."

"And what did Mr. Wild say to that?"

"As before, he promised to make every inquiry, and said he would get the lace back if it was possible."

"And did he succeed in doing so?"

"No. I went again, when he told me he had had an interview with a man who knew the thieves, and that this man had stated to him that the thieves would not surrender the property for less than five-and-twenty guineas. This amount, after some hesitation, I consented to give. I handed it to Mr. Wild, and he undertook that my lace should be delivered at my shop in the course of a couple of hours."

"I then asked him what recompense he expected for the trouble he had taken."

"And he answered as nearly as I can remember in the following words:

"Not a farthing. I have no interested views in matters of this kind, but act from the principle of serving people under misfortune. For the service I can render you I shall only expect your prayers, for I have many enemies; but we will talk further upon this matter. I will call upon you to-morrow morning, after you have received the lace."

"And what took place next?"

"I went home and sat up all night, expecting every moment that the tin box containing the lace would arrive; but no box came. In the morning I expected to see Mr. Wild, and so I had patience, but he did not come, and then I heard that a warrant had been issued for his apprehension, and that he had fled no one knew where."

"Then it seems you lost your box of lace and parted with five-and-twenty guineas into the bargain?"

"That is the truth, sir—I did, and the loss almost ruined me. As I told you, I gave Mr. Wild the five-and-twenty guineas, but I never saw either my money or my lace again until I saw the latter at Bow Street, where the prisoner was brought up for examination."

"I suppose that is all you can tell us about the matter?"

"It is, sir, for of course since he has been prisoner I have had no intercourse with him whatever."

"That will do, then; but probably Mr. Wild has some questions to ask you."

"I have," said Wild, in a voice which told how fearfully enraged he was—"I have. Mrs. Stretham, look at me. I suppose you consider yourself an honest woman, and fully understand to nature of an oath?"

"I do."

"Then," said Wild, louder than before, "how can you come into this court, and stand there in the witness-box

and swear to facts which you know are wholly and entirely untrue?"

Mrs. Stretham looked exceedingly agitated, and at last she said:

"All I have spoken is true. You did receive the twenty-five guineas, and I never had the lace."

"It is false!" said Wild. "You have been hired to play this part by those who are plotting to deprive me of my life, but a day will come when you will regret what you have said. Are you aware that if your evidence is believed I shall be pronounced guilty, and sentence of death passed upon me? What then will be your feelings when you know I have been executed, and upon a charge of which I am wholly and entirely innocent—executed through your instrumentality? If I am hanged, you will be my murderer!"

Mrs. Stretham seemed ready to faint.

The Attorney-General rose hastily to his feet.

"My lord," he said, addressing the judge, "can you permit this state of things to continue? I claim protection for my witness. This is not the proper way for the cross-examination to be conducted. It is infamous, and I call upon your lordship to shield this respectable witness from the abuse of the prisoner at the bar."

CHAPTER CCCCXCIX.

THE JURY RETURN A VERDICT OF GUILTY AGAINST JONATHAN WILD, AND THE JUDGE PASSES SENTENCE OF DEATH IN THE USUAL TERMS.

A HUR of applause from the spectators in the court followed this speech, for there was not one who did not feel deeply indignant at the manner in which Jonathan Wild had spoken.

All had observed with what reluctance Mrs. Stretham had given her evidence, and it was universally believed that she spoke the truth.

Order was quickly obtained, and then the judge said:

"Prisoner at the bar, I cannot allow you to conduct yourself in this manner. If you have any questions to ask this witness, ask them, but you must do so in a proper manner."

"My lord," said Wild, fiercely, "I decline to say any more—you have all made a resolution to hang me, and it is folly for me to struggle against so many, while I am placed in the position I now occupy."

"Such talk is idle," said the judge, "and you must be silenced. There is no determination, at least upon my part, to procure your death, except the law demands your life. Once more, if you wish it you may ask the witness any questions that you may think likely to be of benefit to yourself."

"No," said Wild, "I will say no more."

In this the thief-taker made a virtue of necessity. He did not believe that he stood the least chance of making Mrs. Stretham contradict herself.

He was well aware that every word she had said was perfectly true; she had not exaggerated or misrepresented one single fact, and the conviction came over him that it would require more skill and certainly more calmness than he possessed at that moment to achieve anything on his own behalf by questioning her.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury," said the Attorney-General, "this is the case for the prosecution. It remains for you to decide whether the evidence you have just heard bears out the facts which I have stated to you; if, in your judgment, they do, your duty is plain and simple. I have no more witnesses to call—no more evidence to offer. I beseech you to weigh well all that has been said."

The Attorney-General sat down, and public attention was immediately directed to the prisoner.

All wondered what he would say.

For a minute or two he wondered the very same thing himself, but when calling up all the audacity he possessed, he said:

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—I trust you will hear with patience the few words I have to say—they will not occupy you long.

"Once more I repeat that I am the victim of a conspiracy. The evidence that has been brought before you, and which sounds so plausible, has all been got by my enemies, and its very plausibility will show how clever and unscrupulous my enemies must be.

"Had all this been grounded in fact, the case would not be so clear, simple, and straightforward in all its bearings as it is, but there is no break-in anywhere.

"Gentlemen of the jury, the charge preferred against me to-day was adopted as a last resource; they tried their utmost yesterday to have me found guilty, but they failed.

"It is no good to refer to the past, however; you were kind enough to declare me innocent of theft.

"Even if I were guilty of what is charged against me in the indictment to-day, would it not be monstrous to magnify a crime of so little importance into a capital offence? It is monstrous—monstrous in the extreme!

"But setting that aside, I repeat that I am perfectly innocent, and I ask you, gentlemen of the jury, whether you will pronounce your verdict upon the unsupported evidence of one witness.

"She has come into the witness-box and made a number of statements, not one of which has been proved in any way. I can tell, gentlemen of the jury, and you, my lord judge, by the expression of your countenances, the decision that you have arrived at.

"You are listening with impatience to all that I am saying, and wishing for the moment to arrive when I shall finish.

"Under such circumstances, what heart have I to proceed? I stop at once. I can do no more than repeat over and over again that I am innocent. Unfortunately, I am so placed that I cannot prove what I assert.

"Gentlemen, I have done, but if upon this evidence and under all the circumstances you find me guilty, and if you, my lord judge, pronounce sentence of death, then will all of you, jointly and individually, be guilty of my murder—the murder of an innocent man!"

Jonathan Wild ceased when he spoke these words.

He did not fail to perceive that the last few sentences had produced some effect; but yet, although he was ready to clutch at any frail hope as desperately as a drowning man will clutch at a straw, yet he could not bring himself to believe that he stood the least chance of obtaining a verdict of not guilty.

The judge now summed up, and in a very few words.

It must with justice be admitted that he did not attempt to unduly sway the jury either one way or the other; he simply desired them to bear the evidence in mind, and to weigh well what the witness had stated upon oath, with the assertions put forth by the prisoner, and then pronounce a verdict according to the best of their ability and judgment.

Many thought that a verdict of guilty would be recorded instantly, but such was not the case.

A long consultation followed, during which the thief-taker experienced that keenest of all tortures, the torture of suspense.

Mr. Noakes sat in a huddled-up heap in his chair; his face was ghastly white, and every now and then he would attempt to moisten his parched lips with his fevered tongue.

Few could bear to gaze upon the countenance of Jonathan Wild during the time the jury were deliberating.

At last, after a little more energetic whispering, the jurymen turned round and sat down, with the exception of the foreman, who remained standing.

Perceiving this, the Clerk of Arraigns rose, and, in the most indifferent manner conceivable, said:

"Gentlemen of the jury, are you agreed upon your verdict?"

"We are."

"Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"GUILTY."

Jonathan Wild neither moved nor spoke.

Not a sound escaped his lips, and he stood there as if he had been changed to stone.

Before the jury had commenced to deliberate, he had made up his mind that they would bring him in guilty; when he saw them whispering to each other for so long, hope began to rise in his breast.

But he schooled himself to bear the worst, and resolved not to allow his enemies, if he could help it, the satisfaction of seeing any emotion appear when the verdict was pronounced.

The crowded court became intensely and painfully silent.

The rustling of a piece of paper, or the least move-

ment of hand or foot, sounded with a loudness that was remarkable.

The judge stooped down, and even if he had not been seen, he could have been heard.

He fumbled about in the lower part of the desk before which he sat, and the sound sent a chill of horror through the veins of many of the spectators.

The judge was feeling for the black cap.

At last he put his hand upon it.

He placed it on the desk before him, and deliberately opened it.

With an equal deliberation he placed it upon his head.

At such a moment it is by no means an unusual thing to perceive upon the hard, inflexible features of a judge some touch of sympathy, compassion, or sorrow.

But the judge was calm and firm, and his eye never dimmed for a moment, nor did his voice waver.

In a low tone of voice, which, however, filled the whole of that silent court, he spoke as follows:—

"Prisoner at the bar, you have had a long and impartial trial. Evidence has been given against you; it has been considered, and a jury composed of your own countrymen have pronounced a verdict of guilty.

"With that verdict I entirely agree. I feel certain that you are guilty of the crime laid to your charge, and many others of a more fearful nature. The gallows has long groaned for you, and the end of your career has arrived at last.

"The sentence of this Court upon you is, that you be taken hence to the place from which you came, and from thence to the place appointed for public execution, and that you be there *hanged by the neck until you be dead*, and may heaven have mercy upon you!"

With these awful words, spoken in an unflinching voice, the judge concluded.

CHAPTER D.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS HIMSELF THE INMATE OF ONE OF THE CONDEMNED CELLS OF NEWGATE.

At the time of which we are writing, it was no uncommon thing for a violent and villainous prisoner to burst forth in a torrent of the most horrible imprecations as soon as sentence of death was passed.

Years had elapsed since it was last done, but Jonathan Wild revived the custom.

No sooner had the judge ceased speaking than he uttered a volley of the most awful curses that had ever been heard beneath that roof.

All shuddered.

Jonathan Wild, when he gave his mind to it, was quite a proficient in the art of swearing, and contrived to introduce many expletives which were as blasphemous as they were horrible.

The turnkeys were summoned by the police officers who stood in the dock along with the prisoner, and by their united efforts they endeavoured to drag him away.

But for a moment or two Jonathan Wild possessed the strength of a dozen men.

Clenching his fists, he struck out wildly on all sides, and stretched several officials upon the floor.

Had any missile been within his reach, he would, beyond all question, have hurled it either at the judge or at the Attorney-General; but, fortunately for both those gentlemen, there was nothing movable upon which the thief-taker could lay his hands.

Mr. Noakes knew nothing of all this.

As soon as the sentence of death was pronounced, he dipped from his chair in a swoon.

With much trouble and difficulty, Jonathan was at last removed, and conducted to one of the condemned cells.

He was thrust in and the door carefully secured.

From the manner he acted it is quite possible that for the time being his senses had completely deserted him.

He had ceased to be conscious of what he was about.

But there soon came an end to this violence, and he was forced to sink down, thoroughly exhausted and overpowered.

He remained in a species of swoon or stupefaction for two or three hours.

At the end of that time, some of his old energy returned to him, and he said:

"My foes have triumphed, but they will find their victory a barren one! They made up their minds to hang me,

and have succeeded in obtaining a verdict of guilty, and sentencing me to death, but they have not hanged me yet, and I fancy they will find that a difficult operation.

"Upon what a paltry charge, too, have I been to-day tried and condemned—a charge which, only to-day, was never considered more than a misdemeanour! Never mind, I shall live to have my revenge upon them all. Now that Jonathan Wild is the inmate of a condemned cell, doubtless they think their trouble is over, but they will find that they have yet a great deal to dread!

"I will escape," he said—"and escape this very night. It will be easy enough. I might have made my escape before had I so wished it, with less trouble than Jack Sheppard had, but there was just a chance that I might be acquitted, and I thought I might as well take my chance, for, now that I am condemned, I shall have no more trouble in escaping than at first.

"This time they shall find out what I can do; and when they can succeed in capturing me, I shall give them leave to do what they like with me."

Night was now coming on very rapidly.

The cell in which the thief-taker sat was plunged in total darkness, but he waited patiently. It was not late enough for him to commence to carry out his plans.

He listened intently, until at last he heard the hour of eleven struck by the clock in St. Paul's Cathedral.

He waited till the half-hour was chimed, and then, going to the door of his cell, he tapped upon it and demanded to see the Governor.

The turnkey departed on this errand at once, for Mr. Noakes had given him special instructions to lose no time in carrying out Jonathan's commands.

The Governor was seated, miserable and alone, in one of the rooms devoted to his own use.

He looked a melancholy, pitiful object, for he had been all along expecting this summons from the prisoner.

"I am coming in a moment, Thomson," he said, nervously, to the turnkey. "Go back and tell Mr. Wild I shall be with him directly."

Mr. Noakes went to a cupboard in the room, and took out a bottle of brandy, which he placed before his lips, nor did he remove it until he had swallowed a considerable portion of its contents.

He shivered when he had taken the fiery draught, and feeling much as a man would who was about to be led to execution, he proceeded through the dreary corridors to Wild's cell.

The feeling came strongly over him that his troubles were about to commence, and that in the future there was nothing but misery in store for him.

Upon reaching the cell door, he ordered the turnkey to retire, for he was afraid that the man should put his ear to the keyhole and listen to the conversation that was about to take place.

The man departed willingly enough, and the Governor entered the cell, closing the door behind him.

"You sent for me, Mr. Wild," he said, in a shaking voice—"what is it you want? I am sure if there is anything I can do for you in your present painful situation I shall only be too glad."

"Bah—stuff!—don't talk like that, but attend to what I say."

"Yes, Mr. Wild,—I am all attention."

"Very well, then, as there is no occasion whatever for the exhibition of any ceremony between two such old friends, we may as well come to the point at once, without beating about the bush."

"Well, Mr. Wild, what is it you want?"

"Something very simple—just open all the doors that stand between me and the street. I intend to leave the prison at once."

Mr. Noakes uttered a groan.

"Oh, Mr. Wild, don't jest in such a way as that,—there is no pleasure in such joking!"

"Joking!" said the thief-taker. "You will find I am quite in earnest!"

"But what an outrageous request, Mr. Wild! What do you think would become of me if I was to do as you command?"

"I don't care what becomes of you, so long as I am free."

"But just consider for a moment. I have been made specially and particularly responsible for your safe keeping, and what do you imagine would be the result when



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES COMMIT A ROBBERY ON THE HIGHWAY.]

they found, as they could not fail to do, that you had escaped with connivance?"

"The most likely thing to occur under such circumstances would be, I should say, your dismissal from the post of Governor of Newgate."

"That would be it, Mr. Wild."

"And I suppose you have quite an affection for this snug little office—it suits you—you are quite in your element, and I suppose you would not like to give up such a comfortable situation?"

"Indeed I should not, Mr. Wild!"

"Well, I don't wonder at it. I should like such a post myself, but we must all bow to circumstances. It may be disagreeable to lose your situation, but then that might be the lesser of two evils. Think it over."

"I know I am in your power, Mr. Wild."

"You are, and so I briefly tell you this. You have the choice of two alternatives,—you can refuse to listen to the request which I have just made, but if you do, to-morrow

No. 105.—BLUESKIN.

I shall make such revelations as will be easily substantiated, and you will be removed from your situation, and, in addition to that, made a prisoner yourself and brought up for trial at the next assizes."

The Governor's teeth chattered, for he knew perfectly well that Jonathan Wild spoke no more than the truth.

"Well, now, upon consideration, don't you find that it will be very much the best to help me to escape? If you do that you will only lose your situation; if you refuse you will not only lose your situation but your life as well."

"Ah, Mr. Wild, I never dreamt that this would be the termination of the good understanding that has existed so long between us."

"I suppose not," said Wild, "but I foresaw the possibility of the coming of such a day as the present, and therefore I adopted what means I could to get you securely into my power."

The Governor wrung his hand.

"Hark!" said Jonathan Wild, "I can hear the clock

of St. Paul's striking the hour of twelve! There must be no delay; I must go at once or not at all!"

"What shall I do?—oh, what shall I do?"

"Just whichever you like; but I know what will be the best for both of us."

"But in the morning what should I say when your escape was discovered?"

"You might say you resisted, and that you had been overpowered; though if I stood in your shoes I should not wait for morning to come."

"What do you mean?"

"I should leave the place immediately, taking with me whatever there was valuable I could lay my hands on, and getting as far away as possible before daybreak."

Most heartily did the Governor regret that he had ever lent his aid towards the furtherance of Wild's plans. He saw his error now, and, like many other people, repented when it was too late.

"If I could have foreseen this," he said, "how differently I should have acted."

"No doubt you would; but that is neither here nor there—time is passing away."

"Alas—alas!" moaned the Governor. "I am the most miserable man in London to-night!"

But while he spoke these words the Governor's right hand wandered to his breast and stopped there.

Jonathan observed the movement.

"You have a weapon concealed there!" he said.

"I have," said the Governor, pulling a pistol from the breast of his coat, "and I will take your life rather than you shall force me to aid in your escape! I will say I was forced to shoot you in self-defence."

"No, you won't," said the thief-taker, as he wrested the weapon from the Governor's hand. "I now possess an additional argument."

He seized Mr. Noakes by the arm as he spoke, and placing the pistol close to his head, said:

"Now, then, will you lead me out of the prison or not?"

"I must submit—I must submit! Come on, I am a ruined man for ever!"

"Not so; you have talents which will soon exercise themselves to your advantage; never fear of that. Come on, I must be some distance from the prison before the clock strikes the hour of one!"

Much against his inclination, and with a very heavy heart, Mr. Noakes opened the door of the cell.

Jonathan still kept his grasp upon his arm, and held the pistol in a threatening manner towards him.

"Now," he said, "make the least alarm at your peril—If you do I will fire, and you will be a dead man!"

"I will make no alarm. Now that I am compelled to submit, I will do so with the best grace I can."

"A wise resolution. Now, where are your keys?—open this door, and be quick about it!"

The Governor always carried about with him a bunch of keys with which he could unlock all the doors in the prison.

The one which barred their progress and which had caused Wild to speak was quickly opened.

Passing through it, they continued their way along the corridors, until Wild suddenly said:

"In which way do you intend for me to leave the building—not by the vestibule?"

"No, there are too many turnkeys about. I was going to take you to my apartments and let you out at my private door."

"Good!—that will do very well—it could not be better! Come on!"

In a few minutes afterwards another door was opened.

This was the one that formed the communication between the Governor's house and the prison itself.

The passage on the other side was covered with some kind of matting, so that it was possible to walk almost noiselessly upon it.

"We can't leave the prison bare-headed and as we now are," said Wild.

"We?" said Mr. Noakes.

"Yes; upon consideration, I have determined that it will be best for your welfare not to stay till morning. You had better avoid the questions that will be put to you, and, in order that you may continue to be safe, I am going to make you the companion of my flight."

The thief-taker spoke as though he was doing a really

generous action; but the Governor could not see it, and was by no means grateful.

"Come," said Wild, "we must both wrap ourselves up in cloaks, and we must have a hat each,—you have got such things somewhere, I am sure!"

"I have, Mr. Wild, but they are upstairs."

"Well, we will go upstairs and fetch them, then. Is this the staircase?"

When Wild asked this question they were close to the foot of a flight of stairs.

"Yes," replied the Governor.

"Come on, then, and in a few minutes we shall reach the street."

The two villains ascended the stairs, and the Governor entered a room, in which he found two cloaks and two hats.

These they put on in such a way as to disguise themselves as much as possible, and then they proceeded to descend the stairs.

Going a little further along the passage, Wild caught sight of a light, and then, to his dismay, found some one was approaching.

"What's the meaning of this?" he said,—"*is it some treachery on your part? If it is, beware!*"

"No—no!" said the Governor, "it is no treachery of mine! I fancy it is the ordinary who is coming, and if so our plan will be ruined entirely."

"Not so—we must conceal ourselves."

Close to where they stood Wild perceived a door which opened out of the passage.

He hastened towards this door, dragging the Governor with him, then, opening it, he passed quickly into the chamber beyond it.

Still retaining his clutch on Mr. Noakes's arm, Jonathan Wild stood just inside the room, listening to the approach of the person in the passage, and feeling very doubtful as to what would be the result of the encounter.

CHAPTER DL.

THE BANDIT CHIEF MAKES A SEARCH IN THE CAVERN FOR EDGORTH BESS.

JONATHAN WILD has for a very long time past occupied the whole of our attention, to the exclusion of the other characters.

For awhile, then, it is necessary that we should leave him standing just inside this room, in a state of great suspense, while we go back to Edgworth Bess and relate what happened when the banditti rushed into the cavern in which she was concealed.

It will be remembered that, along with Crazy Carl, she was crouching down behind that singular-looking monument which had caused her so much alarm when she first caught sight of it.

From this position she had been able to see, without being seen, the different proceedings of the banditti.

She had noted the artful manner in which they drew the wild boar out of the cavern, and how, by one brisk discharge of their firearms, they had put it out of the brute's power to do any harm to them.

It was then that the bandit chief waved his sword and rushed into the cavern, calling to his men to follow him.

To his vexation and astonishment, however, they suddenly stopped short, and refused to advance a step further.

In vain he called upon them and threatened what he would do if they refused obedience to his commands.

It was evident that they were swayed by a much stronger feeling, and from their manner it seemed as if they were more than half inclined to retreat from the cavern altogether.

They even called out to their chieftain to retire.

"This is the children's cave!" they cried—"this is an accursed spot! If we advance further into its recesses, we shall be swallowed up like those children were whose fate that monument commemorates!"

"Fools!" cried the bandit chief. "Do you place belief in such an idle tale as that? Come on, I say, or rely upon it I will make you rue the consequences of your refusal!"

The men, however, still hung back, and refused to advance.

"There is the monument!" they cried, pointing into the darkness—"there it stands! That is where the

earth opened, and where the children were swallowed up!"

"And if it was," said the chief, "that is no reason why it should open again. Idiots and cowards that you are, remain where you now stand, and I will search this cavern myself!"

The men could not avoid feeling a very great amount of admiration at this exhibition of courage upon their leader's part; nevertheless, so great was their demur, that they one and all cried out aloud, and entreated him to forego his rash intention.

When the wild boar had uttered that awful cry of rage, Crazy Carl was so terrified at the hideous sound, that he fell flat to the earth.

In his fall he extinguished the rude torch he had carried, so that the bandit chief had nothing whatever to guide him in his search, or to indicate in what portion of the cavern the fugitives were concealed.

But, with his drawn sword in his hand, the bandit chief rapidly searched over the whole of the cavern.

Edgworth Bess had half swooned when he first entered, and she came to the conclusion that all was over—that she would be recaptured, and that it would be perfectly useless to resist any longer.

But when she became aware that, from some cause or other, the banditti were afraid to advance into the cavern, her courage rose again.

She touched Crazy Carl upon the shoulder, and by signs compelled him to rise to his feet.

The obscurity of the cavern was greatly in their favour; at first it had seemed to be perfectly dark, but by this time her eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, and she could dimly perceive those objects which were not far off.

This also seemed to be the case with the bandit chief, for he avoided the many obstacles which lay around him.

His long, bright sword seemed to attract towards it all the light there was in that gloomy place, and to reflect it with redoubled brilliancy.

Edgworth Bess avoided him easily, and no doubt some time would have elapsed before Grimm could have captured her, had not the sound of Crazy Carl's footsteps reached his ear.

He hastened in the direction of the sound, and just at that moment the poor idiot was unfortunate enough to stumble over a piece of rock which jutted from the floor of the cavern, and to fall heavily upon his face.

Ere he could rise, the bandit chief seized him by the neck, and dragged him to the entrance of the cave, where his followers were assembled in a dense throng.

As soon as Grimm recognised Crazy Carl, he uttered a howl of rage.

He released him, and struck him a violent blow with his sword.

Carl fell to the earth bleeding and a corpse.

This success appeared to have an inspiring effect upon the bandit chief, and he again dashed into the cavern in pursuit of the other fugitive.

Edgworth Bess could scarcely restrain herself from uttering a scream when she saw what a sad fate had overtaken the companion of her flight, but she felt that she was powerless to aid him in any way, so she turned the whole of her attention to looking after her own safety.

The cavern was a large and almost circular place, from which she could find no outlet whatever.

Grimm paused and listened, and managed to catch the sound caused by the rustling of her dress.

He bounded forward, and Edgworth Bess escaped being caught in his grasp by the merest trifle.

Still, she did escape, and this fact lent her redoubled strength to hasten onwards.

But she could find no outlet, and at last, breathless and entirely exhausted by her efforts, she sank down half fainting upon the floor.

Grimm saw her sink down, and, sheathing his sword, he hastily raised her in his arms, and carried her out into the open air.

"Cowards!" he cried, addressing his men. "You see how much danger there was in entering this cavern! What harm has come to me? If you had chosen to assist me, I should not have had half this trouble, and should have succeeded long ago!"

Carrying his prisoner in his arms with the greatest

possible amount of care, he led the way through the forest in the direction of the ruined castle.

This was much nearer than might have been expected, for, in her hasty flight, Edgworth Bess had taken a circuitous route, and was going closer and closer to her prison, while she was all the time under the impression that she was going farther and farther from it.

Without accident or interruption, the banditti arrived at their destination.

Edgworth Bess was just conscious that she was being carried back to the prison from which she had escaped with so much trouble, and that was all.

Grimm hesitated for some time as to where he should bestow his prisoner, but then he reflected that it was not her cell which had proved insufficiently secure; his prisoner had escaped from it through the treachery of another.

He could prevent all treachery in the future, and so he made up his mind that he would once more place her in the little chamber in the turret.

He did so, and carefully locked and secured the door.

Several hours elapsed before Edgworth Bess properly recovered her senses.

When she found, after all her toil and trouble, that she was once more an inmate of her former prison, she burst into tears, and felt that her heart would surely break.

"What can be this man's object?" she asked herself. "What can he want with me? It seems I have lost one persecutor to find another. Was ever anyone so unfortunate as I am?"

Night came, and found the poor girl still weeping, though not so violently as before.

No one had been near to disturb her in any way, and at last she sank off into an uneasy, unrefreshing slumber.

When she awoke, she went to the loophole and found that the sun had risen.

His golden beams were shining with great beauty upon the tree tops.

As on the former occasion when she had looked through that loophole, she was now unable to detect any signs of life; no one was stirring, not even one of the banditti.

The poor girl had but one hope, and that was that, when Blueskin and Jack Sheppard arrived at the woodman's hut and found it in ruins, they would at once make an immediate search for her.

She wondered greatly that they had not made their appearance earlier, and wondered whether anything had occurred to detain them.

Then she recollected that even if they did find she had left the cottage there would be no clue by which they could ascertain where she had gone, or what kind of fate had befallen her.

Her only hope was that, by standing at the window watching patiently, she might perchance catch sight of the two only friends she had in the world.

She had no heart to attempt to make another escape, after having experienced such a signal failure—in fact, she looked upon escape as an impossibility.

Slowly and drearily the day passed away, and darkness came again without her having had her hopes raised in the slightest degree.

She was surprised that the bandit chief should have remained so long without paying her a visit.

She could not even tell whether the banditti were at that moment in the ruins or not.

All was perfectly still, as though the whole place was deserted.

The night passed even more disagreeably than the preceding one, and she began to wonder within herself whether they intended to allow her to perish of starvation.

Upon awaking in the morning, however, she found that her chamber had been visited during the night, for on the floor was a basket containing some very coarse fare.

It was clear, then, that they did not intend to allow her to perish of hunger.

Going again to the loophole, the poor girl looked despairingly out, but her eyes failed to find any fresh, unfamiliar object.

Every hour that elapsed gradually increased her uneasiness.

She began to fear that something dreadful had occurred either to Blueskin or to Jack—perhaps to both.

So intently occupied was she in gazing through this window, that she did not hear the fastenings removed, nor the door open.

She turned round with a scream of fright upon feeling some one touch her on the shoulder, and upon turning round she found herself face to face with the bandit chief.

In his hand he carried pen, ink, and paper, and these articles he deposited upon the one table in the turret chamber.

"You understand what I mean by bringing you these? It is in order that you may write a letter to your friends, acquainting them of your situation, and stating that, upon the payment of eight hundred thalers, you will be set at liberty."

"I have no friends," said Edgworth Bess, "who possess any such sum."

"Bah! Why do you repeat that nonsense? However, I don't wish to hurry you—take your own time. Here are the writing materials. When you feel inclined, you can begin your letter. As soon as it is finished I will take care that it is forwarded to its destination without any loss of time."

With these words, Grimm turned upon his heel and departed, closing and carefully securing the door after him.

After one glance at the writing materials which he had brought, Edgworth Bess turned again to the window, and looked out.

Then a fresh thought entered her mind, and with great speed she tore up the paper which had been brought into a number of small fragments.

Upon each of these she wrote a few words to the effect that she was a prisoner in the hands of banditti, and confined in a turret in the ruined castle.

These she threw, one by one, out of the narrow aperture, but she had great difficulty in doing so, owing to the thickness of the walls, and the distance which intervened between each grating.

Some pieces of the paper seemed to fall straight down to the ground, while others were caught by the wind, and whirled over the tree tops for a considerable distance.

She was in hopes, if her two friends were searching for her, that they might find one of these pieces of paper, and so learn where she was, and the peril in which she was placed.

It was a frail hope, and but little could be expected to result from this proceeding, for it was not likely that fragments of paper would be carried to any great extent, yet it would be hard to say where they would be blown to, or by whom they might be found.

After the last piece had been thrown she waited in great suspense for some result to follow, but there was none; without all remained as profoundly silent as before.

All the paper was used up, and now that it was gone she began to wonder for the first time what Grimm would say when he discovered that she had destroyed it.

But she would not suffer the fear of what he might do to be any trouble to her, and hoped most fervently that one of the fragments might be found.

But when she saw the sun declining to the west—when she knew that ere long he would set, and night would come again, she began to give herself up to despair.

Suddenly, at a distance, she perceived three human forms.

They were making their way along a broad, open glade in the forest.

They were waiting off for her to be able to recognise them, and yet her heart seemed to tell her that they were her friends.

She knew that her voice could not possibly reach them, and yet she placed her mouth close to the iron grating, and called out aloud in frenzied tones.

Then they became suddenly lost to her sight, and she burst into tears.

Then she thought if it was her friends who were approaching, they would be able to see the tower when she could not see them, and so there would be a chance of attracting their attention if she could give any signal.

But this seemed to be impossible, until she bethought herself of tearing a portion of the covering of the bed into long strips, which she tied together.

When she had a sufficient length she went to the loophole.

The iron bars were not so close together as to prevent her from putting her arm through; but the outer grating was at too great a distance for her to be able to reach it.

But with great patience, and after many trials, she succeeded in pushing one end out.

The wind caught it, and made it flutter like a pendant, gradually drawing it further and further out.

She tied the other end to the inner grating, and then waited with great anxiety and suspense for the result of this experiment.

But she did not again catch sight of the three figures she had seen, and it was just as the sun sank behind the tree tops that she heard a loud shout, which was responded to by a cry; then came other shouts, and finally the clashing of swords and the report of firearms.

A contest of some sort was evidently going on at the foot of the tower, but by whom it was carried on, or whether it was likely to be anything in her favour, she could not tell, for she had nothing but her sense of hearing to guide her.

By degrees the sounds of combat died away, and finally all became as silent as before.

What was meant by this completely baffled her, nor could she judge who was victorious in the encounter—the banditti, or those by whom they were attacked.

She waited for a long time, listening patiently, but nothing happened to furnish her with a clue to these strange events, and when darkness came she hid herself down upon the rude couch, feeling more distressed and broken-hearted than she had ever done before.

CHAPTER DII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD SUCCEEDED IN DISCOVERING THE PLACE WHERE EDGORTH BESS IS CONFINED.

It is now time we returned to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, whom we last left on the morning when they set about making their search through the wood.

They had not been able to obtain a very good night's rest, but still they were considerably refreshed, and pushed through the dense undergrowth with much less fatigue and difficulty than they had experienced on the previous day.

It was in vain, however, that they looked around them in search of something which would serve them as a clue to the whereabouts of Edgworth Bess.

They were constantly on the look-out for any unusual object, and at last Jack Sheppard perceived upon a thorn bush something white and fluttering.

Upon examination, this was found to be a portion of a woman's dress.

It was as though she had been running rapidly, and the thorn bush had caught her apparel and torn a small piece out of it.

"Look," said Jack Sheppard, as he placed it in Blueskin's hand, "here is certain proof that we are on the right track! I am sure this is a portion of the dress which Edgworth Bess wore, and it may be that we shall find her before we go much further."

This discovery stimulated them to fresh exertions, but, although they looked carefully and keenly on all sides, mid-day arrived without their having been so fortunate as to obtain any further clue.

Fatigue now compelled them to come to a temporary halt, where they partook of another meal as rude and primitive as those which they had lately had.

Rising to their feet, they renewed their search, and continued it until nightfall.

During the darkness it would be ridiculous to continue their search, so they very wisely came to a halt.

They happened to be in the vicinity of some huge jagged rocks.

They imagined they would not have to go far without finding a crevice or indentation in one of these, which would serve them as a place in which to pass the night, for after their previous experience they felt but little inclination to remain in the open air.

Their conjectures proved quite correct, and in a few minutes they found a hollow in the rocks, which, although it appeared to extend to no great distance, was yet quite large enough to answer their purpose.

Entering this cavern, if such it can be called, they made a hasty examination of it, in order to satisfy themselves that no wild animal was lurking there.

Nothing of an alarming character, however, was found. The floor of the recess was thickly covered with leaves and other rubbish which had from time to time drifted in from the forest, but there was nothing more.

"Here will be capital lodgings for the night," said Jack Sheppard. "The only thing necessary will be to collect a quantity of firewood and place it in the interior. We should then have to make a fire quite across the mouth, and when this was alight it would form an impassable barrier to all wild creatures."

Jack's suggestion was carried out.

All three set to work to collect dry wood, and place it inside the cavern, and in the space of a very few minutes they had made quite a large fire. Behind this they felt they should be quite secure, but yet, as a measure of additional precaution, and in case anything should occur during the night, it was agreed that they should take it in turns to watch and sleep.

Morning came without anything having occurred to disturb them, with the exception of the occasional howling of the wolves.

When they commenced their search the next morning they were rather more downcast than before.

Still they did not despair, and resolved not to rest until they had accomplished their purpose.

Keeping close to the rocks, they came at length upon a sight which filled them with astonishment.

This was the carcass of the wild boar which had been shot by Grimm's banditti, and our friends could tell when they looked at it that only a short time had elapsed since it was slain.

Looking around, they perceived the marks of many footsteps, and following these, they found they led to the mouth of that cavern in which Edgworth Bess had found a temporary refuge.

Of course they did not hesitate to enter, and almost the first thing they discerned was the lifeless body of Crazy Carl.

They dragged it out into the open air, in the hope that they should be able to find life was not quite extinct.

But they were disappointed—the poor fellow was quite dead, though his body was scarcely cold.

After some deliberation they determined to procure a light and search the cavern.

The branch of a tree, which was of a resinous quality, served for a torch, and was easily ignited by the means of the flint and steel which formed the lock of one of their pistols.

It burnt clearly and gave forth a ruddy light.

By its aid they examined every portion of the cavern.

The floor was hard and firm, and they were unable to detect the imprint of any footsteps upon it.

A close search round the walls convinced them that there was no outlet from the cavern, except the one by which they had entered it.

They looked with great curiosity at the singular monument behind which Edgworth Bess and the idiot had for a little while concealed themselves, and they wondered greatly what could be the meaning of the erection of a monument in so strange a place.

In what they had seen so far there was nothing to show them that Edgworth Bess was connected with, but although they had no proof, they could not help feeling this conviction.

They were forced at last to return to the open air and to acknowledge that what they had discovered amounted to nothing.

Still, when they looked upon the dead body which they had found, they could not help coming to the conclusion that it looked very much like the work of banditti—and had not Ned Cantle told them that it was banditti who had carried off Edgworth Bess?

All round the mouth of the cavern the grass was much trodden down, indicating the presence of many people.

In the hope that this might furnish them with the clue they wanted, they examined the footprints with great attention.

They came at last to a place where they led into the forest.

The undergrowth was broken and trampled down, and they were able to follow this path easily enough, until at last, to their vexation, the traces vanished, and they had nothing whatever to guide them.

They wandered on until nightfall, when they were again compelled to come to a halt.

All three were greatly fatigued.

They were out of spirits too, for when they commenced their search they did not anticipate that it would last so long and be so fruitless.

They were not near any cavern, and so they were forced to remain in the open air during the night, but they made a huge fire, and consequently suffered no interruption.

In the morning they recommenced their apparently hopeless task.

Now that so long a time had elapsed, they began to fear that the poor girl would be taken completely out of their reach.

The closest scrutiny failed to show them any other clue.

The forest seemed as though it had not been trodden by human feet for centuries.

They were weary and disappointed to the last degree, and every hour that elapsed made them believe that they stood less and less chance of success.

The remainder of the day was spent like so many previous ones had been, in wandering about among the trees.

There is no doubt that they doubled many times upon their footsteps, and went over the same ground again and again.

The next morning they were so enfeebled and exhausted, that it was with the greatest difficulty that they managed to creep onwards at all.

At last they emerged into a glade of great length and considerable width.

It was on rising ground, and consequently they were able to obtain a more extensive view around them than they had been able to do since they first entered the forest.

Simultaneously all three caught sight of a massive-looking ruin in the distance.

"What place is that, think you?" asked Jack Sheppard, in an anxious voice.

"It looks like the ruin of some old castle or other, but how it happens to be situated in the midst of a wood, as it appears to be, I can scarcely tell you."

"Do you think it likely that the banditti of whom we are in search have taken up their quarters there?"

"It is very, very probable. We will push forward and see; if it is not, why we shall have a tolerably comfortable place in which to pass the night."

In the hope that they had at last discovered the place to which Edgworth Bess had been taken, and yet almost dreading to indulge in that hope lest their disappointment should be greater than they could bear, they made their way along the smooth open glade in the direction of the ruin.

As they proceeded the ground sloped greatly downwards, so that in a little while the building was lost to sight.

But they remembered its position, and pushed forward with confidence.

At last it once more came in sight, and then, happening to glance up, they saw something fluttering from a loophole in the topmost turret.

Jack's heart beat violently when he perceived this signal, and grasping Blueskin tightly by the arm, he said:

"Look—look, my friend. Tell me, if you can, what is the meaning of that?—does it not show that Edgworth Bess is a prisoner in this place, and that she has adopted this means to let us know it?"

"There seems every probability that such is the case but if so, we must proceed with great caution; we do not know the numbers of the banditti, and we have had many convincing proofs that they are desperate characters, and not at all likely to stick at trifles."

"Yes, we will be cautious," said Jack; "at if she is there and the banditti number a thousand I would not rest until I had set her at liberty."

With more caution than they had yet used, they drew nearer to the ruins of the castle in order to reconnoitre.

They soon found that it was a huge rambling place, that some portions were in the last stage of decay, while others presented something like a habitable aspect.

"If we can conceal ourselves among the ruins," said Blueskin, "I have no doubt all will be well; we shall have a chance then of making our way up into the turret; the danger is that we may be seen before we can reach the walls."

"All is still," said Jack; "there appears to be no one about; very likely the banditti are absent on some excursion. If such is the case, we shall have a glorious opportunity of effecting our purpose."

"I am afraid that is too much to hope for. However, as there seems no one about, we will steal cautiously across this open space and conceal ourselves among the walls."

With this intention they crept rapidly yet cautiously forward.

Scarcely, however, had they reached half-way, than they heard a sudden shout, and then a body of well-armed men rushed out upon them.

Almost before they were aware of it, they found themselves surrounded by the banditti, who were led by Grimm himself.

The numbers of the banditti were so greatly superior to their own, that our friends felt in a moment that it would be madness to resist, but for all that, they defended themselves with great vigour and determination, for they resolved not to surrender until compelled to do so.

The banditti made no attempt to slay them—if they had, they would have succeeded without difficulty.

Their intention, however, appeared to be to take them prisoners.

This was no easy task.

First of all the widow's son was seized and borne away, then a number of the banditti laid hold of Blueskin, while as many more surrounded Jack Sheppard, and in spite of their frantic struggles they were made prisoners.

"Bring them along," cried Grimm—"bring them along this way, my gallant hearts! Fortune smiles upon us!"

The banditti set up a cheer, for they were vastly delighted with the victory they had gained, and followed their chieftain into the interior of the ruins.

A door was opened, and our friends were compelled to descend a flight of rude stone steps, which appeared to lead down to the very foundations of the building.

After descending a great distance, Grimm paused before a massive door, deeply set into an archway.

The iron bolts were drawn back from their rusty sockets, the heavy bar was removed, and by an exertion the key was turned in the lock.

The door was then pushed open, and Blueskin and Jack Sheppard were thrust into the dark and dismal dungeon beyond.

The door was closed and carefully fastened, and in a moment afterwards our friends found themselves listening to the footsteps of their captors.

CHAPTER DIIL.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE, AND HAVE TO FLY FOR THEIR LIVES.

WITH an intentness that no words can possibly convey the least idea of, Jonathan Wild stood near the partially-opened door, listening to the approach of the person who was coming.

It was a man. He could tell that by the firm, heavy tread, and whoever it was he carried in his hand a light, the reflection of which the thief-taker could plainly see shining on the walls of the hall.

Mr. Noakes shook in every limb, and the extreme terror which he experienced caused a cold perspiration to break out all over him.

His teeth chattered audibly, and he tried in vain to keep them still.

Nearer came the footstep, and as it did so, Jonathan Wild's uneasiness increased, and he retreated slowly from the door.

The Governor put his lips close to Wild's ear and tried to whisper something to him, but his voice failed him altogether, and he could not.

Jonathan set his teeth and prepared himself for the worst.

His worst forebodings were realised when the footsteps

paused upon the threshold of the room in which he had taken refuge.

Then the door was pushed open, and a figure carrying a lamp in its hand made its appearance.

Jonathan let go his hold upon the Governor's arm, and sprang forward like a tiger.

He seized the new comer by the throat with so violent a grip, that before he had time to utter a cry of alarm he felt he was choking.

The lamp dropped from his hand and rolled on to the floor, but was not extinguished.

By the faint light which came from it, Jonathan saw who his antagonist was.

As Mr. Noakes had fancied, it was the ordinary of the prison.

The room into which they had retreated was one set aside for the chaplain's own use.

He would be not a little astonished at the reception he received. When he saw who it was, Jonathan forced him into a chair.

The ordinary had on a very large white neckcloth.

This Jonathan speedily slipped off, and passing it once round his neck, secured it to the back of the massive arm-chair.

He did this in such a manner, that although the pressure around the ordinary's throat was not enough to cause strangulation, yet it made respiration difficult, and left him without the power of shouting for assistance.

Mr. Noakes sank down in a huddled-up heap on the floor as soon as ever Jonathan let go his hold upon his arm.

He remained there in this position as though insensible, until Jonathan had securely bound the chaplain, and it is probable he would not have risen then had not Wild dealt him a furious kick in the ribs, which caused him to utter a howl of pain.

"Make another sound like that," said Jonathan, fiercely, "and it will be your last! Get up, I say, and be quick. We have no time to waste!"

Painfully and slowly the Governor rose up.

"Have you killed him?" he said.

"Killed who?"

"The ordinary."

"No—no, I have only accommodated him with a seat; he won't interfere with us. Come along—be quick!"

The thief-taker almost dragged Mr. Noakes out of the room.

Upon gaining the door, he paused and turned the key in the lock.

"Now," he said, "show me the nearest way into the street! Come along—a moment's hesitation may spoil all!"

Uttering suppressed groans, the Governor led Wild along the passage to the front door.

At the command of his companion, he removed the fastenings.

Wild raised the latch and cautiously opened the door to the extent of about a couple of inches.

The cold night air blew gratefully upon him, and he drank it in with sensations of the utmost pleasure.

He looked out into the street, but all was perfectly silent—there did not seem to be a single human being abroad.

"Come on," said Wild, addressing Mr. Noakes—"be quick! Slip through the door, and close it gently after you!"

The Governor obeyed.

A flight of four steps led from the Governor's private door down to the pavement.

On the topmost step Wild paused while the Governor closed the door.

Although he was very careful, a slight sound was produced, and both stood still and terrified, fearful that some one should have heard it.

Just at that moment the heavy tramp of a footstep on the pavement reached their ears.

Jonathan muttered a curse.

"Draw back," he said—"draw back! The shadow of this doorway will conceal us—we will wait until the man passes!"

"Past one o'clock, and a cloudy morning," bawled the voice, and then both Jonathan Wild and the Governor knew that it was the watchman who was approaching.

Just then he came in sight.

In one hand he carried a lantern, and in the other a rattle.

He paused in front of the doorway, in the shadow of which they were concealed, while he muttered:

"I fancied I heard someone's door shut! Shall I take no notice of it or not? Past one o'clock, and a cloudy morning."

The watchman swung his lantern so that the light fell upon the Governor's private door, and then, as a matter of course, he caught sight of the two figures that were standing close against it.

"Hullo!" he said. "Oh, murder!"

He sprang his rattle as he spoke, but he was only able to cause the instrument to make two or three revolutions.

As soon as they found they were discovered, Jonathan rushed down the steps.

He held his pistol by the barrel, and, striking the watchman one terrific blow on the head with the butt-end, laid him senseless on the pavement.

Jonathan Wild turned round for his companion, and found that Mr. Noakes was standing trembling on the steps.

He clutched him tightly by the collar.

"Fool!" he said. "Why do you linger here? We must fly for our lives! Hark! there goes another rattle—and another! The alarm has been given, and, if we are not careful, all our trouble will go for nothing. Come on, I say!"

Despite his evident unwillingness to proceed, Jonathan dragged the Governor across the street, and turned down a narrow lane that was nearly opposite.

The springing of rattles and loud shouts could now be heard on every side, and Jonathan was fearful that after all he should be discovered.

But his intimate acquaintance with the streets of London proved of great value to him, and he took turning after turning with a rapidity that would have bewildered anyone.

But he knew where he was going, and had it not been that he was encumbered with the Governor, he would have made much better speed than he did.

"Come on!" he roared to Mr. Noakes. "I will blow your brains out where you stand! Come on, I say! Why do you hang back?"

"Leave me here," said the Governor—"leave me here! I will go my way, you can go yours!"

"No you won't! For the future we keep close together. It is important that we should not part; and for things to be comfortable, is to do just what I tell you. Come on, I say! Can you not hear they are behind us?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Run, then—run! Don't feel afraid! If you will exert yourself, I will soon place you in safety!"

Loud shouts and cries came from the rear, showing that, by some means or other, the watchmen had got upon the right track.

In another moment the fugitives gained Fleet Market.

Just then a bell began to toll with rapid and alarming strokes.

"Your escape has been discovered," said the Governor, pantingly. "We are as good as taken already!"

"Nothing of the kind, I say,—come on! Don't flag, or you will repent it! You need not think that I shall leave you. If I escape, you escape—if I perish, you perish!"

Crossing Fleet Market, Jonathan Wild made his way into that maze of courts which lie between Holborn Hill and Fleet Street.

On he went at a furious speed, compelling Mr. Noakes, by the continual utterance of awful threats, to follow him.

Suddenly a man appeared before them, and outstretching his arms, strove to arrest their progress.

But with one blow Wild felled him to the earth, and, trampling over his body, continued on his way.

When they reached Fetter Lane they paused, for the double purpose of recovering their breath a little and listening to the sounds of pursuit.

They were much fainter than they had been, and this discovery made Jonathan feel inclined to redouble his exertions.

The Governor of Newgate was in such a state of dread and terror, that he could scarcely keep his feet.

"I can't follow you much further, Mr. Wild," he said, imploringly—"indeed I can't!"

"But you must!" returned the thief-taker, fiercely—"you must! It is quite necessary for my safety that we should keep together. It will be a long time ere we part, my friend!"

The Governor groaned.

"I shall sink!" he said—"I shall fall to the ground! My limbs are giving way beneath me!"

"I can't help that! Come on, I say!"

Every time the thief-taker uttered these words, he would give his companion a sudden pull, which would almost bring him to the earth.

The thief-taker had no very clear idea as to where he should go just then; the only thought which occupied his mind was that of getting away from his pursuers in as short a space of time as possible.

In a few more minutes they emerged into Chancery Lane from a narrow court situated nearly opposite the old gateway leading into Lincoln's Inn.

Loud shouts and the trampling of footsteps could still be heard behind, and Jonathan ground his teeth with vexation, for he could already feel the effects of the exertions he had been obliged to make.

"What shall we do?" said the Governor, in a piteous voice. "In another moment they will be upon us!"

"No they won't," returned the thief-taker. "We are in luck's way—look there!"

As he spoke, a hackney-coach came lumbering along at rather a rapid rate.

"Stop!" cried Wild, at the top of his voice, addressing the driver—"stop! You can have two guineas for your fare!"

These words evidently reached the ears of the driver of the hackney-coach, for he pulled up his horses with a suddenness that very nearly threw them down.

"All right, your honour's lordship," he said. "I am the man!"

"Don't get down," said Wild, as he saw the driver about to get down from his seat; "I am in a great hurry. I want you to drive us to the corner of Oxford Road, and, if you go quickly, you can have two guineas for your trouble."

While speaking these words, Wild opened the door of the coach, thrust Mr. Noakes inside, and scrambled in himself.

"Drive on!" he roared, as he closed the door and held it shut without fastening it—"drive on for your life!"

Jonathan was only just in time, for at the very moment the driver put his horses in motion, a tumultuous crowd of persons poured out from the narrow court into Chancery Lane.

The driver whipped his horses unmercifully, and they galloped over the stones at a furious rate.

Round the corner into Holborn they went at undiminished speed.

Still holding the door with his hand, Jonathan looked behind him.

They were rapidly getting away from their pursuers, though he knew very well that, as his escape from Newgate was discovered, mounted officers would be sent out in pursuit.

Every moment he expected to hear the clatter of horses' hoofs on the silent roadway, but to his joy no such sound reached his ears.

Suddenly the coach stopped.

Jonathan projected his head from the window.

"What are you pulling up for," he asked.

"Corner of Oxford Road, sir," said the coachman.

"All right!"

Jonathan stepped from the coach, dragging his companion with him.

He had not a fraction with him, but nevertheless, he put his hand into his pocket, as though feeling for the amount he had promised the man.

Seeing this, the driver got down off his box, with the intention of receiving the amount and closing the door.

"Hie!" said Wild, quietly, "here you are! You have performed your services well!"

The man touched his hat and came forward unsuspectingly.

Wild took his hand out of his pocket and held it as though the money was between his fingers.

As soon as the unfortunate driver was near enough, he

clenched his fist and struck him a tremendous blow in the face.

The man staggered.

Jonathan did not allow him the opportunity of recovering himself, but struck him a more violent blow than the preceding one.

The driver dropped down into the street as though shot, and lay there as motionless as a log.

CHAPTER DIV.

JONATHAN WILD GETS THE BETTER OF THE OFFICERS BY AN INGENIOUS ARTIFICE.

THE driver of the hackney-coach fully believed in Jonathan Wild's good faith, and never dreamed for a moment that he intended to serve him in such a shameful and rascally manner.

Mr. Noakes, too, was much taken by surprise, although he had been wondering where his companion was going to get the two guineas from that he had promised him as his fare.

"That is a settlement in full," said Wild, calmly. "Don't you think that is very well managed indeed?"

"What do you intend to do?"

"I'll tell you. But hush!—hark! What is that?—listen!"

The sound of horses coming at full gallop reached the ears of Jonathan and the Governor with great distinctness.

"They are after us," said Mr. Noakes; "they have discovered all, and are in full pursuit."

"Yes! and if they capture us you will find your position a very unpleasant one indeed."

"Thanks to you!"

"Ha—ha! It was to be! But why stand lingering here?"

"What is it you intend to do?"

Jonathan paused thoughtfully for a moment, and then said:

"All right—I have it! Just you keep your courage up, and all will be well!"

Jonathan did not stop to explain, but very much to Mr. Noake's astonishment, he stooped down, and quickly divested the driver of his huge white coat and hat.

These he rapidly put on.

Addressing Mr. Noakes, he said:

"Get up on the box. I will sit beside you and drive!"

"And the man—what shall you do with him? Shall you leave him in the roadway?"

"No; I thought at first of doing so, but now I have a better thought. Wait a moment!"

Jonathan stooped down, and by an exertion of strength lifted the insensible driver in his arms, and placed him in an upright position on one of the seats in the coach.

Then, shutting the door, he scrambled upon the box, took the reins in his hand, and seated himself by the side of Mr. Noakes, who was trembling in every limb.

By this time the horsemen had got very near, and the beat of their hoofs could be heard with alarming plainness.

Jonathan muffled himself up well in the great coat, and pulled the hat well down over his brows, and then, with an appearance of great calmness, whipped the horses, and drove rather slowly along the Oxford Road.

Ere he had gone many yards, he heard a loud shout and cries behind him.

At first he took no notice, and did not try to increase the pace at which the horses were going in the least, and when he heard those in the rear stop, he pulled up there and then, in the middle of the road, very much to the dismay of Mr. Noakes.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Wild?" he asked, in an agony of apprehension.

"Never you mind! All you have to do is to sit still; if you say a word or move you will be a dead man!"

Jonathan looked back and saw, as he had fully expected, that those who were coming along at such a rapid rate were police officers.

In another instant they reached the coach, and paused in a dense throng near it.

One, who appeared to have the command, rode forward and put his head inside the coach.

"Shure now, gentlemen, an' would you please tell me what all this manes?" said Jonathan Wild, speaking with

an admirable Irish brogue—"what is it you're after now?"

"Why, did not you pick up two men in Chancery Lane a little while ago," said the chief officer, withdrawing his head from the interior of the coach.

"Divil a bit, yer honour! I picked the gentleman up I've got inside by Holborn Bars! You mane the other hackney-coach, I'll be bound!"

"What other hackney-coach?"

"Why, one that passed me awhile ago. It was going at a furious rate! I wouldn't like to swear to it, because it went by so quick, but it's very odd to me if it did not go up Tottenham Court Road."

"I saw nothing of a second hackney-coach," said the police officer, "but I'll ask your fare if he knows anything about it."

Wild laughed.

"Divil a bit, sir! he's got as heavy a load as he can carry. I picked him up at Holborn Bars. The poor gentleman's drunk an' insensible!"

The chief officer paused in doubt.

So admirably had Wild played his part that, although he knew the thief-taker well, he never once suspected his identity.

"You say that another coach passed you?"

"Yes, your honour."

"And how many people were inside it?"

"Shure now, how should I know that?—it was by like a shot! I just caught sight of the jarvey, and that was all."

"And it turned up Tottenham Court Road?"

"I wouldn't like to swear to it, yer honour, for fear I should be mistaken, and so lead you astray, but I believe that's where he went."

"Who's that on the box with you?"

When Mr. Noakes heard this question asked, so terrified was he that he almost fell to the ground.

But Wild answered, with perfect calmness:

"Yer honour, it's my friend, Pat Flin; it was him that found the gentleman drunk and insensible in the road, and so he called me, and we're going to take him home, and that's how it comes that he's on the box with me to-night."

There was nothing peculiar or unusual about Wild's answers.

It was no uncommon thing for persons to be driven home in a hackney-coach while they were in an insensible state.

"Come, my boys!" said the commanding officer, "I am afraid we have lost the scent! Still there is nothing else left for us to do than to try the Tottenham Court Road."

"Have you done with me, yer honour?" asked Wild.

"Yes—drive on!"

"Good luck to yer, gentlemen! Good night!"

Wild whipped up his horses and started off, while the officers turned round and took their way along the Tottenham Court Road.

Jonathan had a narrower escape than he thought for.

The real driver inside was fast recovering from the effects of his blows, and if he had stayed—or, rather, if the officers had kept him—only a few minutes longer, the man would have recovered sufficiently to give his account of the matter.

"Was not that well done?" said Wild, addressing his companion—"did you think we should get off so easily as that? Why, what are you trembling and shaking for in that manner?"

"Oh, Mr. Wild!" said the Governor, "I am not used to these narrow escapes,—they terrify me—they do indeed!"

"Bah! All's well! The trouble and danger is over now! Before these officers discover their mistake we shall be far enough off—never fear!"

"But where is it you intend to go?"

"That is more than I can tell you,—I shall be guided entirely by circumstances. If it will be any consolation to you, I can tell you that you will go with me wherever I go."

"I think we should be better apart, Mr. Wild,—I do indeed!"

"Never mind what you think—I will have things my way!"

Wild started, for at this moment there came from the interior of the coach a most unearthly yell.



[BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD DISCOVER THE BANDITTI'S STRONGHOLD]

"That is our friend inside," he said. "Well, never mind, we are in a lonely place, and let him make as much noise as he will—no one will hear him!"

"Stop—stop!" cried the driver,—“where are you going to?”

"What's that to you?" said Wild. "Hold your row, or it will be the worse for you!"

The driver then did a very foolish thing, though probably at the time he was scarcely in full possession of his senses.

He opened the door of the coach and attempted to get out.

The consequence was he rolled headlong into the road.

Jonathan lashed the horses till they broke into a gallop, and in a few moments the driver was left behind, although he scrambled to his feet and ran as fast as he could after the vehicle.

The success of this little device put Jonathan Wild in excellent spirits—he seemed to look upon it as a token of how he should get on in future.

No. 106.—BLUESKIN.

He drove straight on until he came to Kensington Gravel Pits, and here he paused.

"Get down!" he said, addressing Mr. Noakes, "we are far enough from London. I don't want to get too great a distance. This will do very well."

The Governor reluctantly obeyed, and Wild, having secured the reins to the piece of iron at the end of the seat on which he had been sitting, took hold of the whip and got down likewise.

He took hold of the bridles of the panting horses, and turned their heads in the direction of London.

Then, stepping aside, he gave them several severe cuts with the whip, running along by the side of the coach for several yards in order to do so.

At a mad speed the infuriated horses galloped off towards London.

"We are clear of them, at any rate," said Jonathan, "and I think it will puzzle the police officers to trace us to this spot."

"But where are you going?"

"Follow me, and you will see; I know all the ins-and-outs of this place perfectly well."

Wild turned off from the high-road, leading his companion by the arm.

"Stop!" he said, suddenly; "you will have to descend here, and you must be careful, as you stand a good chance of breaking your neck!"

All around was perfectly dark, and so these words caused Mr. Noakes no small amount of terror.

To his great relief and satisfaction, the moon broke out from a dark cloud and partially showed him where he was.

He stood on the verge of an old gravel pit, the depth of which seemed unfathomable.

It had evidently not been used for a very long time.

The sides were covered with ferns and such other vegetation that is found growing in similar places.

"Come on!" said Wild,—"there is a snug retreat at the bottom, and I am not at all afraid that we shall be found."

"But how are we to reach it?"

"There is a winding path which is well known to me," was the reply. "Take hold of my hand, and follow carefully in my steps—I will lead the way."

Mr. Noakes by no means relished this adventure, but he was forced to submit; and he felt that it was only one of many disagreeables that he would have to put up with.

Although he spoke so confidently about knowing the path, Jonathan Wild proceeded with very great caution indeed.

There was good reason for it, for the path was only just wide enough to allow one person to walk upon it, and one false step would have the effect of precipitating him to the bottom of the abyss.

The loose soil crumbled in many places beneath, and went rolling down into the depths below.

Mr. Noakes's fright was excessive, and he clutched wildly at the shrubs which grew out from the side of the pit, heedless of the injuries that he inflicted upon his hands, for many bushes were of a thorny character.

To add to the discomfort of his position, the moon again went behind a cloud, and all was dark as the very grave itself.

Every now and then the thief-taker would speak to his companion, generally in a gruff and angry tone of voice.

At last, without the occurrence of any accident, though they had several narrow escapes, Jonathan and Mr. Noakes reached the bottom of the gravel pit.

The latter looked up, and saw they were at a great distance from the surface.

He could just see the clouds above, which appeared to rest on the very edge of the excavation.

"Be careful how you tread," said Wild. "Be sure you follow in my footsteps, for there are many deep and treacherous holes hereabout, and some of them are partly filled with water."

It was quite evident that the thief-taker was intimately acquainted with this place, for he walked across the bottom of the gravel pit with great confidence, and without making one false step.

At last he stopped before some low, rude building, the principal outlines of which Mr. Noakes could dimly distinguish, for his eyes were becoming accustomed to the deep gloom.

"What place is this?" he asked.

"Where we can hide in security," replied Wild. "I feel quite safe now."

"Is it a shed?"

"Yes. I fancy it must have been built many years ago for the accommodation of the men who dug the gravel in this place. Perhaps it was made in order to contain their tools."

"Very likely. Can you get in?"

"Oh, yes! The place has not been occupied since I can remember. The door will open with a push. I could mention several who have hidden themselves here, and never been found."

Wild pushed open a little door as he spoke, and dragged Mr. Noakes into the shed along with him.

It was not high enough to allow them to stand upright—indeed, its dimensions in every way were limited.

Jonathan closed the door.

"Here we are," he said. "For a time we shall be safe."

I am worn out now, and shall try to get a few hours' sleep. If you are wise, you will do the same thing."

"I am horribly fatigued," said the Governor. "I am a wretched man—a most miserable one!"

"Pho—pho! There is a pair of us! Better times will come yet, Mr. Noakes! You leave matters to me! I would let you go, for you are more of an encumbrance to me than anything else, only I feel so much safer while you are by my side."

Jonathan gave one of his old chuckles as he spoke.

Both were very, very weary, and they threw themselves down upon the damp floor of the shed with a feeling of very great pleasure.

They were fatigued to the last degree, and before they had laid down very long, both fell asleep.

Jonathan must have had great confidence in the excellence of his hiding-place, or he never would have taken matters so easily as he did.

While both were sleeping thus, what an easy prey they would have been had the officers chanced to find them, and it did not by any means seem impossible that they should track them to their present place of retreat.

CHAPTER DV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES LEAVE THE OLD GRAVEL PIT AND FALL INTO EXTREME DANGER AT THE INN.

THE remainder of the night, however, passed away without the occurrence of any incident.

The slumbers of the two companions in crime were undisturbed.

No officers came near, and so they slept in security and peace.

No, not in peace—in security it might be; but the dreams which visited the slumbers of both were of the most horrible description.

When at last they awoke, it was with a feeling of infinite relief that they noticed that daylight was streaming in through the many crevices in the shed.

"Are you there, Noakes?" said Wild, in a growling voice. "Speak!—are you there, I say?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild," replied the Governor, timorously, "I am here."

"That's all right then! Don't you try to give me the slip, or it will be the worse for you! It is daylight I see."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Then get up, and don't lie there like a fool! Get up, and let us look around us!"

With many groans Mr. Noakes rose to his feet.

His limbs were stiff, and all his bones ached, for he had been compelled to stretch himself at full length upon the damp earth while he slept.

Jonathan Wild got up, and he uttered some horrible groans when he found how the least movement of any of his limbs pained him.

He pushed open the door of the shed and looked out.

It was a miserable morning—rain was descending slowly and steadily, soaking through everything with the greatest pertinacity.

The thief-taker uttered a growl.

"Pleasant weather this!" he said. "But no matter; they won't be so likely to be looking out for us. We are safe, don't you think, Noakes?"

"You know best, Mr. Wild. I hope we are safe!"

"Oh yes!—but what we are to do all day is more than I can tell. I suppose we must remain here and make ourselves as comfortable as we can."

"Y—yes, Mr. Wild," said the Governor; "but it is a very uncomfortable place."

"It is; but there might be more uncomfortable places; for instance: Tyburn on such a morning as this would be very uncomfortable."

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Wild," said the Governor, with a shudder. "I had much rather you hold your tongue altogether."

"I shall do as I please," returned Wild. "You understand you will obey all my commands—if you don't it will be the worse for you!"

"I have always been ready to serve you, Mr. Wild, and I am the same now—I will do all I can for you."

"That's right; it is not much at present. We must stay here all day; when night comes we shall be able to make a move, if we think it necessary. I wish we had something to eat and drink."

"And a fire, Mr. Wild. It is very cold—I am chilled to the bone. Couldn't we have a fire?"

"No, idiot, of course we could not! the smoke would rise above and betray our hiding-place at once. Now, if we had some brandy or rum, or something of that sort, we should be able to keep the cold out."

"So we should."

The two villains, in anything but an enviable frame of mind either with themselves or with each other, crept back into the shed.

Crouching down at some distance from each other, they felt there was nothing left for them to do but to wait in patience for night to come.

What would be done then Mr. Noakes could not tell; he was entirely at the mercy of his companion, and would have to go just where he thought proper.

As for the thief-taker, he was busily engaged in thinking what should be next done.

It was a raw, cold, miserable day, and they experienced much inconvenience and discomfort.

In a little while the pangs of hunger began to make themselves felt, but they had nothing wherewith to satisfy them.

As they grew more and more hungry so did their ill-temper increase, and they were perpetually snarling at each other.

It seemed as if the day would never reach an end; but at last, to their great joy, it began to grow dark, and as soon as the obscurity was great enough, they ventured forth.

The rain had ceased, but the sky looked dark and threatening, and there was every probability that it would turn out a stormy night.

"Come," said Wild to his companion, "follow me, and take care how you tread."

"Where are you going, Mr. Wild?"

"Out of this place. I must get something to eat and drink."

"I am very hungry too, and cold to the bone."

"Of course you are; but we will soon remedy that state of things. Follow me!"

Jonathan Wild strode onward with a confident step, evincing his familiarity with this strange place.

He led the way up the narrow precipitous path they had descended a few hours before, and the two rascals gained the top without the occurrence of any accident.

All around looked very cheerless and dismal, and the ground was completely soaked by the rain which had fallen so continuously all day.

The thief-taker led the way to the high-road.

To reach it they had to force a passage through a strong hedge.

Before doing this, Jonathan Wild provided himself with a stout, heavy stick, almost a bludgeon.

He grasped the lightest end, and whirled it round in his hand with extreme satisfaction.

"Now," said Wild, as soon as the high-road was gained, "this seems a nice, quiet spot, so we will wait here and see what turns up."

"What are you going to wait for, Mr. Wild?"

"Money," was the laconic reply.

"You are not going to commit a highway robbery?"

"Why not? Surely you are not the man to stick at a thing like that!"

"But the danger!"

"Stuff! Never mind the danger; besides, we must have something to eat and drink. I have no money—have you any?"

"None."

"Very well, then, what else are we to do? You would not have us starve, would you?"

"This will be the death of me," said Mr. Noakes, shivering. "I am sure it will be the death of me. Why not let me go, and allow me to seek my own safety in my own fashion?"

"Because I don't choose to do so! Silence!—hark! I can hear something approaching!"

Mr. Noakes listened, and could hear the rumbling of wheels, and then soon after he perceived in the distance two small twinkling lights.

"The stage coach," said Wild. "We must creep back into the shadow of the hedge and let it pass us; it is no good for us to think of stopping that."

Mr. Noakes was only too glad to shrink back, and,

crouching down under the hedge in a dry ditch, they waited for the stage coach to pass by.

On came the huge, lumbering vehicle at a rapid rate, and swept past them with a prodigious clatter.

"Patience," muttered Wild. "Something will come in our way before long—there are always plenty of people upon this road."

Mr. Noakes said nothing.

As the rumbling sound produced by the stage coach passed away, another sound became audible to his ears.

This was the rapid beat of horses' hoofs upon the road. Jonathan listened intently for about a moment, and then he said:

"They are officers!"

Mr. Noakes uttered a cry of alarm, and made a frantic effort to dash through the hedge.

Jonathan prevented him by roughly seizing hold of his arm.

"Keep still, you fool!" he said. "What are you going to do?"

"Let us fly while we have the chance!"

"Nothing of the kind! Keep still where you are; the officers will not dream of our being here, and will pass, beyond a doubt."

As the approaching troop of horses drew nearer, Jonathan Wild's surmise was proved to be correct.

They were police officers, and proceeding at a rapid gallop.

They dashed past the spot where the fugitives were concealed, without for a moment suspecting their presence there, and Jonathan Wild had the satisfaction of watching their retreating forms.

Mr. Noakes was so full of alarm at having had this narrow escape, that he trembled so excessively as to be scarcely able to stand.

Jonathan still kept hold of him, in case he should attempt to run away.

About a quarter of an hour passed away in perfect silence, and then the quick ear of the thief-taker detected a footstep.

"Hush!" he said to his companion. "There is some one coming at last! Move or speak at your peril!"

Some one was walking along the road in the direction of London.

It was one man, and he was whistling some complicated tune in a very loud key.

As he heard him coming, Jonathan grinned ferociously, and clutched the stick he had taken out of the hedge with additional tightness.

Not dreaming he was in any danger, the traveller walked on with a brisk and confident step.

At last, Jonathan caught sight of his dusky form.

He allowed him to pass by the spot where he was concealed without attempting to molest him, but as soon as the unfortunate traveller's back was turned towards him, Jonathan rose swiftly and silently to his full height.

With the thick stick raised in the air in readiness to descend at any moment, Jonathan strode rapidly after the traveller.

Then, when he was near enough, he brought the stick down with full force upon the man's head.

He fell as though he had been struck by lightning, and lay in the road on his back perfectly motionless and insensible.

Jonathan Wild laughed horribly and exultingly at the success he had met with.

It was a cowardly, treacherous attack.

He turned round, expecting to see Mr. Noakes just behind him.

But he was not; the Governor had never moved from his position in the ditch.

Wild went towards him.

"Get up," he said—"get up at once! Don't you think I did the job well?"

Mr. Noakes shuddered and obeyed the thief-taker's command.

"Now," said Wild, "I don't intend to perform all the work! You must take your share of it, or else you shall have none of the profits!"

"What do you want me to do?"

"I'll show you."

Wild half dragged the Governor along the road until the spot where the traveller lay was reached.

"Now," he said, "stoop down and pick his pockets—"

take everything there is of any value. I know you can manage that job first rate—you have had plenty of practice!"

Mr. Noakes seemed half inclined to disobey Wild's commands, but at last, with a dismal groan, he sank down on his knees beside the body.

The feeling then came over him that the sooner he performed his task the better it would be, so he searched in all the pockets with great speed.

There was little to recompense them for their trouble.

The traveller had only a small amount of money in his pockets, and scarcely any article of a valuable nature.

Jonathan was much enraged when he became aware of this, though he affected to be content.

"Roll the body into the ditch," he said, "and then it will be out of the way. There is not much money, it is true, but still we have sufficient to purchase something to eat and drink, and that's all we need trouble about just at present."

Mr. Noakes rolled the body of the traveller into the ditch as Wild directed, and then looked up, as though waiting for further orders.

"Come along!" cried Jonathan. "We will now get something to eat."

Both were ready to sink to the earth from the combined effects of cold and hunger.

Jonathan walked along the high-road for a little distance, until he came to a narrow lane which branched off from it.

Down this he turned, and in a little while came to a small roadside public-house.

"Shall you go in here?" asked Mr. Noakes, in some alarm.

"Yes. Why not? It is dark, and the chances are a thousand to one that we shall not be recognised; besides, there is no other place that I know of where we are so likely to obtain what we want."

"I am terrified, Mr. Wild!"

"But you must be calm and collected; if you are not, you will ruin all. Take pattern by me!"

Wild walked into the public-house with as much unconcern as anyone possibly could have done.

His companion crept in after him.

On the left-hand side of the passage was a large room, in which many persons were assembled.

With a boldness that almost amounted to recklessness, Jonathan walked into this public room and seated himself near the fireplace.

Mr. Noakes sat down beside him.

About a dozen men were seated in various positions, engaged in smoking, drinking, and talking.

When the two new comers entered, all bent their eyes upon them, but they were not able to make out much, for the room was only lighted by a few tallow candles, which were stuck into sconces and suspended against the walls.

When they sat down, the forms of Wild and his companion were in deep shadow, so there appeared to be not much fear of recognition.

Wild called for something to eat and drink, and upon the articles being placed before them on the table, both fell to work so ravenously, that they almost forgot where they were.

As they were finishing their meal they heard some one enter the room.

Looking up, they saw it was a man whose dress showed that he was of humble station.

He was greeted by several of those present, and seated himself in a chair with easy familiarity.

"Well, Luke," said one of the guests, "what is the latest news—anything particular?"

"Well yes, if it's true, and I believe it is."

"What has happened then?"

"Why last night Jonathan Wild escaped from Newgate. The Governor of the prison has disappeared, and it is supposed that they are both together."

Mr. Noakes dropped his knife and fork and seemed to be gasping for breath.

Wild dealt him a savage kick when he saw him thus lose his self-control.

The man who had been called Luke continued.

"It seems very mysterious how Jonathan Wild escaped, but the particulars have not been properly made known. One comfort is, they have got upon the rascal's track,

and he is almost certain to be captured before morning."

"I am glad of that," said one of the guests, "for Jonathan Wild deserves hanging a thousand times over!"

"So he does—and look you, I have had it from good authority, that he has been tracked to this neighbourhood. He is supposed to be hiding somewhere close at hand, and the police are out searching in all directions. A party of officers stopped and questioned me not long ago. They were on their way to the inn here. I shouldn't wonder if they don't make a call."

Just at that moment the trampling of horses' feet outside reached the ears of all present, and Luke said:

"Ah! Here they are! I thought they would pay this place a visit—not that I suppose the men they want are here though!"

CHAPTER DVI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ESCAPE FROM THE DUNGEON, AND DISCOVER THE PLACE WHERE EDGWORTH BESS IS CONFINED.

THE attack which had been made by Grimm's banditti upon Blueskin and Jack Sheppard was so sudden and unexpected, that it to some extent deprived them of the power to think, and it was not until they found themselves the inmates of a dungeon beneath the ruined castle that they fully realised their position.

After this, their first care was to ascertain whether either of them had been wounded, and they were rejoiced to find that they were not hurt.

"Should you think we are on the right track?" said Jack Sheppard, coolly. "Do you think these are the rascals that killed Ned Cattle and carried Edgworth Bess away?"

"I have no doubt they are," replied Blueskin. "Ned described them as banditti, and this is evidently their secret haunt."

"But there might be two gangs of them!"

"So there might; but you must not forget the signal that we saw fluttering from that loophole in the turret; there is some prisoner confined there, and my conviction is, that it is Edgworth Bess."

"Then," said Jack, resolutely, "it won't be very long before she is set at liberty."

Blueskin laughed.

"Stone walls and strong doors are no good to confine you with, Jack!" he said. "You think nothing of them! I suppose you look upon it as perfectly easy to make an escape from this dungeon?"

"Certainly I do! Here are two of us, unfettered, and with all our weapons about us. Why, we could have the place down in a very little while!"

"An escape from this place," said Blueskin, "seems insignificant enough in comparison with an escape from Newgate under such circumstances as you managed to escape."

"Decidedly. But let us turn the whole of our attention to considering what we had better do. Something seems to tell me that Edgworth Bess is a prisoner above, and I am impatient for the moment to come when I shall see her once more."

"We had better wait, I think, until the night is further advanced. The banditti then will probably have retired to rest, or else have set out upon some excursion."

"I hope the latter."

"So do I; but let us make as good an examination of this dungeon as we can, and find out which is the weakest part of it."

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, in no way daunted by their situation, made a rigid examination of the cell.

The walls were of massive stone, and so strong and solid did they seem to be, that Jack shook his head and turned away.

The dungeon was lighted by a single loophole high up in the wall, and so narrow that not even Jack Sheppard could have squeezed his slender form through it.

They were thus driven to the door as the only route by which they could hope to escape.

This was of great strength, and strongly studded with iron rivets: and when it had been closed they heard the

banditti turn the key in the lock, shoot two bolts into their sockets, and place a heavy bar across the door.

"We shall have a little hard work to do," said Jack Sheppard, "but the door will yield before us; I have no doubt of that. We will wait an hour or two longer before we commence operations."

Accordingly the two friends seated themselves upon a rude kind of stone bench that was in the dungeon, and talked over their future prospects.

In that subterranean place no sound of any kind from above reached their ears, so they were unable to discover whether the banditti had retired to rest, or whether they had sallied forth into the forest.

At last Jack Sheppard found himself unable any longer to control his patience, and, rising to his feet, he commenced an attack upon the door with a strong clasp knife.

Blueskin seconded his efforts, and it soon became evident that what they intended to do was to cut a hole in the lower part of the door just large enough to allow them to creep through.

That this would be a work of time was quite certain, but still they persevered and continued at their task with a great amount of energy.

At last, one vigorous blow was sufficient to knock the square piece out of the door, and then there was no obstacle between them and freedom.

They crept through quickly, and then paused to listen.

All was very still and very dark, and they had some difficulty in groping about and finding the stone staircase.

Having done so, they began to ascend it, and reached the top without experiencing any interruption.

At the top of the stairs, however, was another door—a very strong one, yet not quite so strong as the one which guarded the dungeon.

Jack Sheppard passed his hands rapidly over this door and felt a lock.

He considered it was quite possible that this was the only means by which it was secured, so, taking his clasp knife from his pocket, he set to work to remove the screws.

This occupied him about half an hour, but at the end of that time the lock came off in his hand.

With a beating heart he tried the door, and, to his joy, found that it would open.

They stepped out into the ruins instantly, and had their object simply been to make their escape they could have done so with very little trouble.

But first of all they had to find their way to the turret in which they believed Edgworth Bess was confined, and after that to release her.

They had nothing whatever to guide them, so they took their course through the ruins at perfect random, until suddenly they stopped upon hearing the murmur of many voices.

They listened and then crept nearer.

"The rascals are enjoying themselves!" said Jack Sheppard. "I wonder which is the way to the turret. If we can find it, and if it is not too strongly guarded, all will be well."

"Let us leave this spot," said Blueskin; "we can do no good by lingering here, and we are running extra danger."

"What had we better do?"

"I should advise that we take the nearest way into the forest; because when we are there we shall be able to see just where the turret is situated and to make our way towards it."

"Let us do so, then."

Creeping forward with as much silence as they could, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard endeavoured to find the way out of the ruins.

In a few minutes they saw before them a low, strong-looking arch, through which they could see the trees in the forest.

They were just about to pass through it, when Blueskin seized Jack suddenly by the arm and drew him back.

There was no need for him to explain his motive for this sudden proceeding—the necessity of it became apparent at once.

A man, carrying a musket in a very slovenly manner over his shoulder, passed slowly by the archway.

He only remained in sight a moment, and then Blueskin asked:

"What shall we do with him?"

"We must manage to dispose of him quietly somehow or other!" returned Jack. "Let us keep in the shade and get a little closer."

They were only able to advance a few steps when the man appeared again.

It was evident from this that he had not far to go backwards and forwards.

Indeed, the probability is, that he was only placed there to guard the archway, and he was walking up and down in order to overcome the severe cold.

As soon as he was out of sight again, our friends took the opportunity of getting a little closer.

When the archway was reached, Blueskin touched his companion on the arm and said:

"Leave the rascal to me—I will settle him!"

"You must do it silently, then—if you make the least noise an alarm will be given."

"I know all about that, do not be afraid."

Blueskin placed himself in readiness to carry out his purpose.

Then the sentinel appeared.

Blueskin dashed forward with great suddenness, and struck him a violent blow with his clenched fist.

So well was it delivered that the man fell to the ground without so much as a groan escaping from his lips.

"Cleverly managed," said Jack. "That is one obstacle less we have got to contend against."

"Be cautious—there may be other men about! We must not be seen."

"All is well!" replied Blueskin. "Quick!—this way!"

He hastened towards the trees as he spoke, and having reached them, he paused.

It was a dark night, and it was only with great difficulty that they were able to see about them.

The ruins of the castle rose up, however, above all surrounding objects, and after gazing for a little while they were able to perceive the turret.

Having made it out, they crept cautiously onwards, keeping their eyes fixed upon it as long as they were able, and then trusting to themselves to keep in the proper direction.

Upon approaching the base of the turret, the sounds of revelry which had before reached their ears again made themselves heard.

"We are close to where they are carousing," said Jack Sheppard. "Be cautious!"

"I am; but, from the appearance of the place, I can't help thinking that the only means by which the turret can be reached will be by passing through the room where the banditti are assembled."

"But that is simply impossible."

"I am aware of it."

"Then we must think of something else. Look up! Do you see that breach in the wall above?"

"Yes."

"Well, if we reach that, don't you think we should manage to gain the turret?"

"It is quite possible."

"Let us try, then, and speedily, for it is our only chance. If we linger much longer, morning will be upon us."

Upon making a closer inspection of the premises, our friends came to the identical place where Edgworth Bess and Crazy Carl had descended.

The edge of the roof was a little above their reach as they stood, but, giving a vigorous leap, they managed to grasp it with their hands, and then to draw themselves up.

Climbing the roof, they reached the wall, and along this they trod swiftly, and gained the ruined chamber with little trouble.

Now, however, they were at a loss how to proceed, for the door opening upon the staircase was situate in a dark corner, and for some time it eluded their observation.

Blueskin discovered it, and uttered a cry of satisfaction.

They found, however, that it was firmly fastened, for, after the escape of Crazy Carl and Edgworth Bess, the bandit chief had been at great pains to have it thoroughly secured.

After having accomplished so much, it was not likely that Jack Sheppard would suffer himself to be daunted by this obstacle, and so, speaking in an encouraging voice to his comrade, he set to work upon it with as much vigour and determination as he had used in his attack on the door of the dungeon.

Although they worked hard, quite an hour elapsed before the door yielded to their efforts.

Then, passing through it, they found themselves on the stone staircase, and they began to ascend it without hesitation.

They suffered great inconvenience from the want of a light, for the staircase was involved in almost pitch darkness, and they had to grope their way upwards by the sense of touch alone.

There were narrow loop-holes here and there, but the night was so dark that they were scarcely of any service, and they would have been ignorant of their existence, except that the sky, as seen through them, was of a lighter tint than the walls themselves.

Believing that he had now accomplished his task, and that in a few moments more he should rejoin Edgworth Bess, from whom he had been so long separated, Jack Sheppard could hardly restrain his impatience.

He bounded up the steps at a speed which Blueskin was totally unable to keep up with, nor did he pause until his further progress was barred by a door.

That door was the one leading into the turret chamber in which Edgworth Bess was confined.

Jack paused before it, and his heart beat so quickly and so painfully, that he was unable to move or speak.

In this condition he was found by Blueskin a moment afterwards.

"Rouse up, Jack! We have succeeded up to the present moment far better than we could possibly have hoped for—indeed, our success alarms me!"

"This door," said Jack—"try it! I have not dared to do so! Tell me whether it is fast?"

Blueskin tried the door, and found it firm, but he discovered that the fastenings were all on the side on which he stood.

There were two bolts, a massive bar, and a ponderous lock: the last, however, was without a key.

"Jack," said Blueskin, "before we do any more, I will knock. Perhaps we shall get a reply—perhaps we shall know who it is on the other side of this door."

CHAPTER DVII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN LIBERATE EDGWORTH BESS, AND OLD GRIMM SETS FIRE TO THE RUINED CASTLE.

THAT night, so eventful to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, was a most distressful one to Edgworth Bess.

At one time she indulged in the hope that deliverance was at hand, and that in a little while she should be freed from her captivity, but as hour after hour passed away without the occurrence of anything unusual, her hopes grew fainter and fainter, until at last they died out altogether.

Throwing herself upon the rude couch, she fell into a strange, dreamy state, half-waking, half-sleeping.

From this she was aroused by a knocking at her door.

She started up and listened for a repetition of the sound, for, not unnaturally, she supposed that her fancy had deceived her.

The knocking was repeated.

Almost suffocating with joy, she hurried to the door, and, placing her lips close to it, said:

"Who is there?"

The voice was faint and almost inarticulate, but Jack Sheppard heard her speak, and he rapped encouragingly upon the woodwork.

"We are here," he said—"Blueskin and myself. We have come to set you at liberty."

With a cry of joy, Edgworth Bess burst into tears, and then, quite overcome, sank down upon the floor of the chamber.

The energy and skill which Jack had before exhibited were as nothing in comparison with the efforts he now made.

Blueskin seconded him in a most able manner.

The rusty bolts were withdrawn from their sockets, the ponderous iron bar was removed, and nothing remained but the lock.

As this was fixed on the outer side, Jack Sheppard knew that the quickest, as well as the most noiseless way to remove it, was by taking out the screws.

One by one he removed them, and then, flinging open the door, he rushed in.

While her friends were at work upon the door, Edgworth Bess had regained her courage.

She had risen to her feet, and as soon as Jack Sheppard entered she sprang forward, and the next moment found herself tightly clasped in his embrace.

For a brief space of time nothing was remembered or thought of except that they were once more united.

Their happiness, however, was destined to be of brief duration.

B'ueskin touched Jack upon the shoulder, and said:

"Be on your guard, but keep silence—some one is coming!"

A cry of alarm almost escaped the lips of Edgworth Bess, but, with great presence of mind, she suppressed it.

Jack listened, and he heard plainly enough that some one was ascending the stairs.

"The alarm has been given!" he said.

"I fear so!" replied Blueskin. "They have either discovered the man I knocked down, or else they have heard us opening this door."

"What is to be done?"

"We must defend ourselves to the best of our ability."

Blueskin strode to the door as he spoke, and took hold of the heavy iron bar.

He stood with this in his hands, waiting for the person who was coming to complete his ascent.

Almost immediately he caught sight of the figure of a man, whose features were revealed by the small hand-lamp he was carrying.

He was recognised by him as the one who had taken the lead in the attack that had been made upon them at sunset.

It was Grimm, the bandit chief.

Blueskin drew back so as to avoid being seen, and Grimm, who had been drinking deeply, came slowly and staggeringly up the stairs.

From his manner, it would almost seem that he was about to pay some ordinary visit, and not that an alarm had been raised, or that he had any idea his prisoners were escaping.

This was a doubtful point, however, and Blueskin determined to run no risks.

He waited till the bandit chief had almost reached the topmost step, and then, holding the iron bar in both hands, he rushed forward with it, and struck him with the end full in the breast.

Grimm uttered a loud shout, and made frantic efforts to preserve his balance, but in vain, and he fell backward down the winding staircase with a crashing sound that was appalling.

"That was an effectual blow," said Blueskin, "but I am afraid it will do us as much harm as good. The whole of the banditti in the ruins now will be aware that something amiss is going forward."

"Never mind," said Jack Sheppard, "we will fight them all; they are cowardly wretches, and scarcely worthy to be our opponents."

"I am afraid you will find our position more dangerous than you think."

"Let us fly!" said Edgworth Bess,—"let us leave this hateful place at once, while we have the chance!—I can show you the way."

"That is good advice," said Blueskin; "we can do no good by remaining here."

All three now prepared to descend the staircase, but before they had gone down many steps they heard loud cries from below, and then the sound of many feet rushing up the steps.

"We must retreat!" said Blueskin. "While we are in the chamber above we shall be able to defend ourselves, but here our position is much worse."

Jack saw this, and did not hesitate to turn back.

"Get your pistols ready," he said,—"it will be a sharp touch, no doubt."

"All right! Mind that you place Edgworth Bess where she will be out of danger."

Jack did so, and then rejoined his old comrade, who stood calmly at the top of the stairs with the iron bar in

his hand which had already done him such a good service.

The banditti were pouring up in a tumultuous throng; they could hear them plainly, but as yet they were not in sight, though the probability was that in another moment at the most they would be.

"If we can only take them by surprise," said Jack, rapidly, "as you took the first one, we shall do well; but, then, that bar, though good against one man, would be useless against many."

"What do you propose, then?"

"In yonder corner I have just seen a couch. There is a mattress upon it. Let us both seize that, and, as soon as the banditti appear, fling it down upon them; rely upon it, they will lose their balance!"

Blueskin approved of this scheme, and placed the iron bar where he could readily take hold of it again.

Jack Sheppard dragged the mattress off the couch, and Blueskin assisted him to carry it to the door.

Just as they had it in readiness the banditti appeared.

Jack's intention was to take the banditti by surprise, and he fully succeeded.

They could not imagine what on earth it was that was coming down upon them.

As Jack had prophesied, it threw them off their balance, and all the more easily because they could not make out what it was that was attacking them.

They were rank cowards at heart, and their terror now was very great indeed.

All the lot disappeared from our friends' view with a rapidity that seemed magical.

Having once lost their balance, they tried vainly to recover it.

Such a horrible din as was caused by their rapid descent had never been heard before.

Their bodies bumped on the stone steps and against the walls in a manner that was really dreadful to listen to, while a chorus of oaths, and shrieks, and yells came from their lips.

Despite the imminent danger in which they stood, our two friends could scarcely forbear a smile.

But the time for action had arrived.

"Now," said Blueskin, "we must take this opportunity to descend."

Once more they began to go down the steps, and once more they were compelled to retreat.

The repulse they had met with, so far from disheartening the banditti, produced an opposite effect.

The bruises and the other injuries they had received worked them up into a fit of the most ungovernable rage.

Furious with passion, they all scrambled to their feet, and rushed up the stairs again, in the heat of their anger vowing and declaring to slay them all upon the spot.

For the same reason as before, it was thought prudent to retreat.

As they got higher up the staircase, the rage of the banditti abated.

Still, they would not forego their intention.

Having met with such great success, caused our friends to feel a great deal of confidence.

They resolved to change their tactics, and stood on the threshold of the turret chamber with a pistol in each hand.

As soon as the dark forms of the bandits appeared round the angle of the staircase, they fired all four weapons simultaneously.

They produced an immediate and decided effect, but still some more furious than the rest continued to press upwards.

A hand-to-hand conflict with these seemed inevitable, yet Blueskin wished to avoid it if he could.

Those banditti who continued to ascend returned the volley with great promptitude, and then, although he almost despaired of success, Blueskin picked up the iron bar in both hands, and flung it lengthways at them.

The manner in which the mass of metal carried the banditti before it was terrible.

Down they went, and this time more severely injured than at first.

For the last time, Blueskin, Jack Sheppard, and Edgworth Bess ran down the staircase, and then they were brought to a standstill from another reason.

Up the spiral staircase, as up some huge chimney, there came dense volumes of blinding, suffocating smoke, the heat of which increased with great rapidity.

"They have lighted a fire at the bottom of the staircase," said Jack Sheppard, "and there seems draught enough to make it roar like a furnace! What is to be done?"

"There is a door a little lower down, through which we can escape!"

"We know it," said Blueskin. "We made our way through it a little while ago."

"Come on, then!" said Jack Sheppard. "The longer we stop the worse the smoke will be."

It seemed the height of madness to continue to descend the staircase, yet our friends well knew that they had no other resource; they must either make a bold rush for it now, or else perish miserably in the flames.

By Jack's directions, Edgworth Bess placed a portion of her dress over her face, so as to keep out the smoke as much as possible, while Blueskin and himself adopted the same precaution.

The pungent smoke, however, confused them beyond measure.

They gasped for breath and reeled.

Once or twice they narrowly escaped a fall.

They had nothing but the sense of touch to aid them in discovering the door.

It was impossible to see more than a few inches before them.

And as they went lower and lower, the heat increased to an insupportable degree, and then the long-tongued flames made their appearance.

Further progress now seemed impossible, and all three felt a powerful impulse to turn and fly.

It was certain, if they remained where they now stood, they would be scorched to death.

Their situation now was alarming to a degree, and they were beginning to despair, when Blueskin suddenly cried out:

"Here is the door!"

They rushed quickly in the direction from which his voice proceeded, and in another second passed through the door.

They were severely scorched by the process, but still they felt that they were for the time being comparatively safe.

The flames began to pour fiercely through the open door into the room, so Blueskin closed it.

This would check the progress of the flames for a few moments, and by that time they hoped they should be out of danger.

To their alarm and horror, however, they discovered that the floor of the apartment which they had gained was so hot as to make it almost impossible for them to walk upon it.

In the distance could be seen the breach in the wall through which they had entered, and, believing that this offered them their sole chance of escape, they ran towards it.

Upon reaching it they looked down, and were unable to see anything but a mass of flames and smoke beneath.

The distance to the ground was considerable, and it seemed impossible to reach it.

What astonished Blueskin and Jack was the rapidity with which the flames had spread.

Had they known all, their astonishment would have ceased.

In anticipation of the time when the end of his career should come, the bandit chief had caused many of the chambers in the ruin to be filled with the most combustible materials he could obtain.

His intention was, that should he find things going against him, he would set fire to the place, and so bring about the destruction of as many of his enemies as he could.

But he had never resolved to do this until driven to it in the last extremity.

On the present occasion, however, he suffered his passion to get the better of his reason.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs, after being hurled down by the blow with the iron bar, he lay several moments quite insensible.

Pain, however, quickly brought him back to life, and then, literally maddened with rage, he sprang to his feet

and set fire to the inflammable materials he had been at so much trouble to collect.

When he saw the rapid and fierce progress of the flames, his passion cooled, reason returned to him, and he regretted that he had been so precipitate.

But it was too late.

No mortal power could possibly quench the fire, and it increased in fury every instant.

CHAPTER DVIII.

BLUESKIN, JACK SHEPPARD, AND EDGORTH BESS ESCAPE FROM THE BANDITS' STRONGHOLD AND EMBARK FOR ENGLAND.

TRULY was the position of our three friends a most perilous one.

When they looked down and saw the flames raging so fiercely beneath them, they instinctively turned back with the intention of retreating and seeking some other mode of escape.

But the fire, which was raging with the utmost fury underneath, had attacked the floor.

The boards were now literally red hot, and the flames shot up between them with increasing fierceness.

It was quite clear that it would be impossible to recross the chamber to the door by which they had entered it.

Not only was the heat terrific, but the state of the floor was such, that the least additional weight pressing upon it would have the effect of carrying it in with one crash.

"We must escape this way," said Jack Sheppard; "and if we are quick I fancy it may be done. We must either try it, or else remain here and be burnt to death. I will drop down on to the wall first, you hand Edgorth Bess to me, and then follow with all the speed you can."

It looked like certain death to make the attempt which Jack Sheppard proposed, still Blueskin thought that if it was their fate to be consumed among the ruins of that ancient building, the event might as well take place while they were trying to escape as while they were standing where they were.

After he had spoken, Jack Sheppard lost not a moment in lowering himself on to the wall.

Edgorth Bess was handed down to him in safety, and Blueskin followed quickly.

All three stood upon that broad stone wall.

Flames were around them on every side, and curling about their feet.

The stone wall was heated to such a degree, that they could scarcely bear to stand upon it.

"Quick!" cried Jack. "Follow me! I will lead the way. If we are speedy, I fancy even now that all will be well!"

Jack did not think so, but he spoke thus in order to inspire his companions with as much courage as he could.

They ran hastily along the wall, and as they got still further from the window through which they had escaped, the heat and fury of the flames much abated.

As we have stated in a former chapter, this stone wall led to some small out-buildings, which were at no great height from the ground.

The roofs of these were not in the least injured by the fire, which had not spread so far, therefore our friends were able to slip down them and reach the ground with very little difficulty and danger.

All were more or less scorched and blistered by the fire, but the injuries they had received were comparatively trifling, and a feeling of deep thankfulness came over their hearts at once more finding themselves on firm ground beneath the open sky.

But they were not destined to get off so easily as they imagined.

There was a shout and a sudden rush of footsteps, and then the bandit chief with three of his men appeared suddenly before them.

Grimm was furious with rage, and rushed forward to commence the attack, calling loudly upon his followers to keep close behind him.

Edgorth Bess uttered a scream, and then swooned as soon as she caught sight of the new comers.

Blueskin placed her on the ground beside him, and then a furious struggle commenced.

But Jack Sheppard and Blueskin were more than a match for four cowardly German rascals, and they laid about them with great vigour and determination.

The conflict was sharp but short.

When it was over, the bandit chief and his three followers lay stretched upon the ground.

Both our friends had been wounded, but not seriously.

They bound up their hurts, and then bent over Edgorth Bess, who began to show signs of returning consciousness.

So anxious was he to get clear of the place, that Blueskin did not wait for her to completely recover, as she probably would have done in the course of a few moments, but picked her up in his arms and hastened off into the forest.

Jack Sheppard followed, so as to be in readiness should the bandits make a further attack upon them.

But they were unmolested.

After going some little distance, Blueskin paused.

He had the will to go further, but his strength was not sufficient for the task; besides, the wound which he had received in one of his arms pained him exceedingly.

By this time Edgorth Bess was in full possession of her senses, and when Blueskin put her down, she was able to stand without assistance.

Actuated by one impulse, which they found themselves unable to resist, all three turned their eyes in the direction of the burning building.

The fire was now at its height.

The flames encircled the old ruin in every part, and shot up into the sky, illuminating every object for miles around with startling brilliancy.

It so chanced that they had halted in that glade in which so good a view of the whole edifice could be obtained, so that the spectacle upon which they gazed was grand in the extreme.

There is a species of fascination connected with a conflagration on a grand scale which few are able to resist, and our three friends stood gazing upon the burning castle as though they were riveted to the earth.

The flames broke out of the little loophole from which Edgorth Bess had gazed out upon the forest for so many hours, and from the manner in which the turret rocked at its foundations, it was pretty evident that it would fall in the course of a few moments.

They waited for this event in the most breathless suspense.

At last, with a terrific crash, the turret fell.

For a few seconds it appeared to have the effect of extinguishing the fire, but directly afterwards it broke forth with redoubled fury.

Then, one after another, the walls fell, and in less than half an hour there was nothing left of the bandits' stronghold except a mass of smouldering rubbish.

"That is over," said Jack.

"Yes," returned Blueskin. "I never saw destruction so complete. We have certainly done good service in destroying such a herd of rascals."

"There is an end of them now, beyond doubt. But where is the boy who was with us?"

Blueskin uttered a cry.

"In the hurry and confusion I forgot all about him!"

"So did I."

"He has perished, then, beyond a doubt. I shall always reproach myself for this!"

"I am at a loss now to imagine how it was that we could possibly forget him."

"It is all over now. You may depend he must by this time be burned to a cinder."

Just as he spoke, a slight rustling among the bushes attracted the attention of all three, and then, to their surprise and joy, the deformed boy appeared before them.

He seemed badly scorched and burnt, and he was literally begrimed with smoke.

To all appearance, however, he had received but little injury.

"By what chance did you escape?" asked Blueskin.

"We had just come to the conclusion that you had perished!"

"I had a narrow escape," was the reply, given with a shudder. "I had lost all hope, when suddenly the action of the fire threw down one of the walls of the chambers in which I was confined. I gave one rush through the flames, and managed to escape."

"You were fortunate."

"I was; and now, what is your pleasure? If you will



[BLUESKIN, JACK SHEPPARD, AND EDGORTH BESS EMBARK FOR ENGLAND.]

take my advice, you will get away from this as quickly as you can."

"We intend to do so, and you shall be once more our guide."

"To what place?"

"To Amsterdam; and when we arrive there, rest assured you shall be well rewarded for all the danger and trouble you have gone through."

"Shall I take you the nearest way?"

"Yes, by all means."

"The road is rough."

"Never mind. It will suit us all the better if it is unfrequented."

The boy nodded his head, and at once took up a position in advance, and upon a signal from Blueskin he began to lead the way.

"Where shall we go now, Blueskin?" asked Jack Sheppard. "What shall we do?"

"I should recommend a return to England. I fancy, after all, we shall be safer there than in any other place."

No. 107.—BLUESKIN.

You must not forget that we have a reckoning to settle with Jonathan Wild."

"I don't forget," said Jack Sheppard; "but first there is Edgworth Bess to be attended to. When we are over there, we shall be able to watch the course of events, and if I can see her in full possession of her rights, the one purpose of my life will be achieved."

"And mine," said Blueskin.

"But will it not be very dangerous to return to England?" said Edgworth Bess, trembling as she thought of Jonathan Wild.

"Surely no more dangerous than it seems to be here."

"Perhaps not. I can assure you I have no wish to stay, for I have not known a moment's peace or happiness since my arrival."

"We shall be better off in England," said Jack Sheppard, "and I fancy, if we are only careful, we shall be easily able to keep out of the way of the officers."

After much more conversation, it was eventually agreed upon that they should proceed to Amsterdam, and then

find out by what means they could secretly reach England.

Their journey was a long and toilsome one, for the road was very rough, but they contented themselves with the reflection that it would save several miles.

Without any incident happening to call for special remark, they arrived at their destination late on the following night.

The poor widow was much rejoiced to see her only son return in safety, for his lengthened absence had filled her with the greatest alarm.

Edgworth Bess was almost prostrated with fatigue.

At the little inn, however, they met with every accommodation, and it was deemed advisable to remain there for several days—at any rate, until they had all thoroughly recovered from their exhaustion.

This was evidently the wisest thing that could be done.

The few days of their sojourn at this inn were the happiest that Jack and Edgworth Bess had passed for a long time, and they almost dreaded the hour to come when they would have to set out for England.

To have taken a passage in one of the ordinary vessels plying between the ports of London and Amsterdam would have been nothing short of insanity, and when he came to make the trial, Blueskin discovered that they would have very great difficulty indeed in getting over to England secretly.

As there was no great hurry, and as they were perfectly comfortable and apparently safe in their present quarters, they resolved to wait until a chance presented itself.

In this manner several weeks elapsed, and in the end, Blueskin managed to make terms with a fisherman who owned a good-sized boat.

He agreed to take them some night, and land them on the coast of Essex.

For this service the fisherman demanded five hundred thalers, which, after having paid the landlady and rewarded her son, was almost all the money they had left.

They were compelled, however, to agree to his terms, for it seemed to be their only chance of getting back.

All was arranged in a short space of time, and one dark, rainy night the three fugitives got on board of the fisherman's boat.

It was a frail old vessel, and seemed scarcely seaworthy, although the owner of it assured them that it was strong enough to weather a heavier storm than they were at all likely to have on their voyage.

With this assurance they were compelled to content themselves, although they had many misgivings.

The large sail was hoisted, and the little craft stood out to sea without the occurrence of any accident, and this inspired the three fugitives with a little more confidence.

CHAPTER DIX.

BLUESKIN, JACK SHEPPARD, AND EDGWORTH BESS REACH LONDON IN SAFETY.

WITH a heavy, rolling movement, the fishing-boat made its way over the rough waves in the direction of the shores of England.

The motion was exceedingly unpleasant; and when they got further out to sea our friends' fears returned, for they fancied every moment that the vessel would founder.

But it kept above the water bravely; and at length, after a most tedious passage, during which nothing of any particular interest occurred, the coast of England came in sight.

Blueskin directed the captain of the boat to put them ashore on some lonely part of the coast of Essex, where there was little likelihood of their arrival being noticed.

This was an easy enough matter, and eventually the lumbering craft was brought to an anchor at a spot from which no habitation or human being could be discerned.

As he had fulfilled his contract, Blueskin paid the fisherman the five hundred thalers which he had promised him, and they were landed in a little boat.

"I am glad we have reached thus far in safety," said Blueskin, as he led the way in a direct line from the sea; "and if we can only manage to gain London without being recognised by anyone, I think we shall have little to fear."

"It will be difficult," said Jack Sheppard.

"It will be toilsome, for we shall have to perform the whole journey on foot. It would never do for us to travel in any public conveyance."

"Certainly not."

"And on foot we are less likely to be taken notice of."

This was true enough, and the only obstacle in the way was that the distance to London was very great, and it was questionable whether Edgworth Bess was equal to walking so many miles.

She expressed her willingness to make the attempt, and so they travelled onwards.

Knowing pretty well in what direction his destination lay, Blueskin avoided the high-road, and, as far as he was able to do so, took his course in a straight line.

They broke their journey by halting at lonely roadside public-houses, where they obtained rest and refreshment.

A great change had taken place in the appearance of our three friends, and there was little fear of their being recognised by anyone, save those who were exceedingly familiar with them, and this made it all the more easy for them to adopt a disguise.

No incident of any kind befel them on their way to London; and at last, when they entered the great metropolis, weary and footsore, Blueskin wisely determined to make a stay in some place where he was not known; and he trusted, by the use of a few precautions, to be able to keep their identity a secret.

There were many places in London where Blueskin and Jack Sheppard would have met with a hearty reception and been carefully concealed; but if they had gone to one of these places, it would have been necessary for them to disclose themselves, and they were unwilling to do this to a single being.

They walked through the streets of London one dark night, Blueskin leading the way towards Westminster, for in this locality he believed he should be able to find the kind of shelter that he required.

He was not mistaken.

In one of those quiet, dismal streets which are to be found at this day in the neighbourhood, they obtained lodgings, and satisfied the landlady's scruples about references by paying her a month's rent in advance.

Here they settled down, resolved to watch the progress of events, and to be prepared to take advantage of any favourable accident that might occur.

They kept close within doors for three days; and as they had not been disturbed during that time, they felt more than ever sure that their return was unknown and unsuspected.

On the following night they resolved to sally forth in quest of information, and so, wrapping themselves closely in large cloaks, they strode off in the direction of the city.

"I don't think we need fear much in the way of recognition," said Blueskin to Jack, "so I should like for us to go into some public room where there are many persons assembled, and listen to their conversation."

"Agreed," said Jack. "I was going to propose the same thing. We cannot fail to hear something."

"No; and I am exceedingly anxious to know what has taken place in London since our departure from it, as you know not one atom of intelligence has reached us."

"It is impossible to say what changes may have taken place."

"I am most impatient to hear more, especially what has happened to Jonathan Wild; he was uppermost in my mind; but I am most anxious to find out something respecting Edgworth Bess."

"Let us enter here and sit down; people seem to be continually going in and out. At any rate, we will take our chance of picking up something."

The two friends entered a kind of public-house as they spoke, in the large room of which some eighteen or twenty persons were assembled, all engaged in talking busily.

They followed closely behind two other persons who entered, and by this means they succeeded in almost entirely eluding the observation of those who were seated, for those who were first were gazed at most.

Selecting the darkest corner they could find unoccupied, our friends sat down, and, having called for refreshment, prepared to listen.

For a long while the conversation turned upon topics in which they felt but little interest. They wanted to know something about Jonathan Wild, but they were not

bold enough to make any inquiry concerning him themselves.

At last the landlord happened to come in, and a man who was sitting by the fireside said:

"Well, governor, is there any news of late? Have they caught Jonathan Wild yet?"

"I haven't heard of his capture as yet," replied the landlord, "but I do know they are searching for him in every direction, and for his companion, Mr. Noakes. They will have them sooner or later—his race is almost run."

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard both started when they heard these words; and well they might, for this was the first intimation they had received concerning the change in Jonathan Wild's lot.

At first they thought they must be dreaming, or had misunderstood what had been said.

They waited impatiently to hear more upon this subject, but, to their disappointment, the landlord was called away, and the conversation was changed.

Blueskin and Jack then whispered rapidly to each other, and presently the latter said:

"I am determined to run a little risk to hear more upon this subject. Can it be possible that Jonathan Wild's career is come to an end?"

"Be careful, Jack!"

"I will, depend upon it!"

The man who had addressed the landlord was looking towards our two friends, so Jack said:

"You were speaking a little while ago, sir, to the landlord concerning Jonathan Wild."

"Well, what of that?"

"I was much surprised at what you said. I have been absent from England for a long time in foreign lands, but I remember Jonathan Wild before I started. He was a very clever police officer, a great thief-taker, and found out all the robberies, and had the people hanged."

"Ha, ha!" said the man, "that's a good joke! His little game has been found out, and you haven't heard any of the particulars?"

"No, that I have not."

"Well, you see, they have found out that Jonathan Wild was the biggest thief in the world, and that, so far from bringing robbers to justice, he employed a whole gang of them."

"Good gracious!" said Jack. "I should never have thought of such a thing!"

"Well, he did it; and it was after the execution of Jack Sheppard—"

"What! said Jack, "has he been brought to Tyburn?"

"Oh dear, yes! I knew very well they would have him some day or other! He broke out of Newgate three times, but they caught him again, and held him tight, and hanged him."

"And so there was an end to Jack Sheppard?"

"Well, not quite, for we heard some talk about him for a day or two after. His body was claimed by some of his friends, and they buried it secretly at midnight in Saint Martin's churchyard."

"Well, that is strange! But what were you going to tell me about Jonathan?"

"It was just after the execution of Jack Sheppard that they found out all his roguery; so they took him prisoner, tried him, and the first time he got off; but they tried him the next day for something else, and he didn't; he was brought in guilty, and sentenced to death."

"Yes—yes!" said Jack, feverishly.

"Well, somehow or other—no one knows exactly how, —he made his escape from Newgate, and took the Governor with him. From that time all efforts to capture them have been in vain, though the police have been searching night and day. A very large reward is offered for their apprehension."

"You quite surprise me!" said Jack—"that is, I should say, about the last thing I should have thought of."

"Ah! strange things do happen—that's certain! I should not have thought of it myself; and you hear up to the present time they have not been able to catch him, but when they do once get hold of him, I'll warrant he don't cheat the gallows another time!"

Some more conversation followed, but as the reader is already acquainted with the substance of it, it is not worth while to detail it.

A few more particulars were elicited relative to Jonathan Wild, but nothing of any great importance.

Our friends then took the first opportunity that offered itself to leave the room.

They walked along the street for some moments in silence, and then Blueskin said:

"I think we have heard enough for to-night, Jack—don't you?"

"I do. I am impatient to get back to the lodgings, in order to tell Edgworth Bess that she has no longer anything to fear from Jonathan Wild."

"I was certain his villany would be found out, and yet I scarcely thought so much could have happened in such a short time. Well, Jonathan Wild has hunted many a person about the country until the death, and now he will be able to see what it is like."

"He will not find so much pleasure in being hunted as he did in hunting," said Jack; "but do you remember what we both took an oath to do?"

"Certainly. Do you imagine I could forget it?"

"Well, then, it seems that chance or fate, or whatever you like to call it, has performed part of it—part of our purpose."

"Yes."

"Still, something remains. Will you consent to join with me in pursuing the miscreant? It would be a sort of satisfaction to me, which I could never forget, if I could only be the means of handing him over to the officers of justice."

"Give me your hand, Jack!" said Blueskin. "We will do it—we will devote ourselves to the task of hunting him down! We will track him as none of the others can, for they will not have such powerful motives as we have."

"Very true! We will set about it, then, to-morrow. Let me once get but the slightest clue as to where he is, and I will warrant I don't lose it."

"We shall get the clue easily enough, but you must not forget our intentions with regard to Edgworth Bess."

"Do not fear that I shall forget that; we can make our inquiries concerning her at the same time, and when once Jonathan Wild is out of the way, the course will be plain before us."

"It will; but it seems to me that revenge is within our reach—that we have only to stretch out our hands and grasp it. We have a long reckoning to settle with him, and the time has now arrived. Could I but have foreseen this, nothing would have tempted me to leave England."

"Why not?"

"Because I should have entered the court. I would have feasted my eyes by gazing upon him as he stood in the felon's dock. If I had to pay for doing so with my life, I would follow him to Tyburn!"

"It is quite as well that you did leave England," said Blueskin. "If you had remained, your identity would have been discovered. As it is, all the world believes you dead, and if you act with only a moderate amount of caution, you will never be discovered."

"I will be cautious, for I am not yet tired of my life. But here we are at our lodging. I am impatient to let Edgworth Bess know that Jonathan Wild will be unable to do her an injury again."

"It will be a great relief to her mind, for she has the greatest dread of him and his power. But before we go in, let us renew our compact."

"With all my heart!"

"We will dog his footsteps—we will follow him everywhere—we will hunt him from place to place, allowing him no rest, nor will we cease until we have seen him safe in the custody of the police officers."

"We will not, and after that will come his execution; and when I see him dangling from one of the cross-beams of Tyburn Tree, I shall feel that I have had my revenge."

"And I," said Blueskin. "We shall be quits."

They then made their way to the chamber in which they had left Edgworth Bess.

The poor girl was delighted beyond measure at seeing them return in safety.

During the whole time of their absence she had been in a state of great suspense and alarm, dreading that they had been recognised and captured.

When they first told her the intelligence concerning Jonathan Wild, she was unable to believe them; and

even when they had related all that they had heard, she was unable to realise it fully.

"I ought not to rejoice," she said, "for he is not fit to die; but he has been a bitter foe to me, without my having done one single thing to provoke his enmity, and I am glad that the time has come for it to be out of his power to do me any further injury."

"It is out of his power," said Blueskin. "The officers are chasing him night and day. He has quite enough to do to look after his own safety, without thinking of anything else."

CHAPTER DX.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN PERCEIVE A BILL OF EXTRAORDINARY INTEREST AFFIXED TO THE HOARDING IN FRONT OF JONATHAN WILD'S HOUSE.

"AND," said Jack Sheppard, with an air of determination, "I shall take care that he knows no rest!"

Edgworth Bess looked at him inquiringly.

"You wonder at my words," he said, "but I will tell you what I and Blueskin have resolved to do. Don't attempt to turn us from our purpose; it will be in vain for you to utter one single word. If you will listen, I will tell you all."

"Do so, then," said Edgworth Bess, faintly, for something like a presentiment seemed to tell her that Jack was about to encounter some new and great danger.

"We have sworn to hunt him down. We will go to the place where he was last seen, and from there we will track him step by step, and never relax in our endeavours until we have seen him safely in the custody of the police."

"But why should you do this?" said Edgworth Bess—"why should you incur this extra and unnecessary peril? If you will leave him, the officers will capture him without your assistance."

"I don't know that. Perhaps the villain may escape; besides, he has been a foe to me, to you, to Blueskin, to my father, and to many others whom I hold dear, and I feel I am called upon to avenge those manifold injuries."

"We will be careful enough of ourselves," said Blueskin. "There is but little fear that we shall be recognised. Sufficient time has elapsed to cause us to be quite forgotten. The only danger there is—and that we need not take into consideration—is that Jonathan may do us some severe injury when he is captured."

Edgworth Bess was silent, but was not convinced. For her own part, she would much rather have left Jonathan Wild to himself, and let the punishment which should overtake him suffice for her revenge; but she knew that when her companions had firmly decided upon any particular course, it was useless for her to attempt to persuade them to act differently. She had tried and failed on many occasions, and in the present instance she had not the heart to try again.

"We will remain here until dusk to-morrow night," said Jack, "and then we will sally forth on this all-important errand. Rely upon it, in three or four days, at the most, Jonathan Wild will once more be the tenant of a cell in Newgate; and when he is once there, such a close watch will be kept over him that he will stand no chance of making his escape."

Nothing further was said beyond this, and Blueskin and Jack Sheppard retired to rest, for on the succeeding night they were sure they should require all the energies which they could call forth.

They slept heavily for several hours, and then rising, waited impatiently for night to come.

Although she had been told that it was useless to make the attempt, still Edgworth Bess tried to dissuade them from their enterprise.

But they would not listen to her fears, and earnestly requested her to remain where she was, and on no account to stir abroad.

Tears streamed from her eyes when they took their departure for of course it was not possible for Blueskin and Jack to say at what hour they would be back.

As soon as ever it was dark enough to make objects confused and indistinct, they quitted their lodgings in search of information concerning the thief-taker.

After much deliberation, they resolved to visit Wild's house in Newgate Street. This would, at any rate, form

a point from which they could begin to make their researches.

No one cast even a second glance upon them as they walked at an easy yet rapid rate towards their destination.

Looking up, they saw that the house was in the same condition as it had been some time past, namely, the outer walls alone remained, the interior having been wholly destroyed by the fire.

A boarding had been erected in the front of the lower part of the house, in order to keep out all intruders.

As Blueskin and Jack stood on the opposite side of the way, they noticed that rather a large crowd of persons was collected round this boarding, but for what reason they could not exactly make out.

No disturbance was going on, for the people were perfectly quiet, only they were all pushing and striving to get foremost.

Caution made our friends hesitate a moment; then banishing it, they pulled their cloaks a little closer around them, and crossing the road, joined the throng.

They then discovered that the people were collected round a large bill which had recently been stuck up.

Several minutes elapsed before Jack and Blueskin could get near enough to read what this bill was about, though they made out that it was headed with "one hundred pounds reward."

Judging from the position in which it was placed, our friends had come to the conclusion that the bill related to Jonathan Wild, and it was partly from curiosity to gaze upon the bill, and partly because they hoped to obtain some intelligence that would aid them in carrying out their plan.

When they got near enough to peruse the bill, they were astonished to find that its contents were of a different, though, if possible, still more interesting nature.

They ran their eyes rapidly over it, and then perused it steadily.

The bill offered a reward of one hundred pounds to any person who would give such information as would lead to the whereabouts of the daughter of — Donnull, who was the heiress to the title and vast estates, but who had in some manner been spirited away.

It concluded with a very good description of Edgworth Bess.

When they had fully mastered the nature of this placard, Blueskin took hold of Jack by the arm and led him away.

Before relating the conversation that took place between them, it will be necessary for us to give a brief explanation of the causes that led to the appearance of the bill.

In the first place, we must remember that the papers fully proving who Edgworth Bess was, and comprising also the full confession of her uncle, the late Lord Donnull, had been taken possession of by Steggs while Jonathan Wild's house was in flames.

It will doubtless live in the recollection of the reader how Steggs escaped from the fire, carrying with him the papers—how he was taken to the hospital—and, upon recovering sufficiently, how he made his way to the residence of the Secretary of State.

It was in consequence of the revelations made by him, and by the papers he produced, that Jonathan Wild was indebted for the active steps that had been taken against him.

We have already described how Jonathan Wild's capture was brought about, just at the moment of his greatest triumph.

The Secretary of State gave orders that every attention should be paid to Steggs, whose testimony would be most important.

The poor fellow was indeed in a most precarious state, and but for the attention he received he would in all probability have perished. As it was, he recovered rapidly, and, when he was well enough, repeated the statements he formerly made, going into all the circumstances with greater minuteness.

From his story, and from the papers, it was not possible to entertain a doubt that the heiress to the Donnull property was no other than Edgworth Bess.

In the meanwhile, the entire property was thrown into the Court of Chancery, and then close search was made in every direction in order to discover her.

But in spite of all their efforts they were unable to

obtain the least clue as to her whereabouts, for it must be borne in mind that her departure from England was a profound secret.

These measures having failed, it was thought necessary to put forth the bill our friends had seen, and which offered a reward of one hundred pounds to anyone who could give such information respecting the heiress as would lead to her discovery.

It had been issued for some time without producing any effect, and Steggs began to fear that in some mysterious way or other the poor girl had fallen a victim to the violence of the thief-taker.

Yet no trace could be found of any such deed, and so, chiefly through his pertinacity, a second edition of the bills was struck off, and they were posted throughout the kingdom as before.

It was one of the second supply of bills that Blueskin and Jack Sheppard had been so fortunate as to catch sight of.

"Blueskin," asked Jack of his companion, as they walked slowly along a deserted street, "what do you think of this? Under the circumstances, what would you advise?"

"I am willing to take time to consider, but at first sight it seems to me that what we ought to do is to make known at once the fact that we can produce the heiress."

"That's what I think. I wish, however, that I could find out what they have obtained the information they have already got."

"I am afraid we stand but a poor chance of succeeding in doing that."

"Well, then, can you see any reason why we should not communicate the knowledge we possess?"

"No—none, except the danger."

"What danger?"

"Of our recognition. Did you notice where the information was to be given?"

"Yes—to the Lord Chancellor."

"Well, then, how are we to give it? If we attempt to see him, don't you think we should be running into a fearful amount of danger?"

"No, I don't. There is danger—I admit that,—but not more than we ought to incur."

"Then you are resolved to go?"

"Quite!"

"And how about Jonathan Wild?"

"We will let him be for a short time."

"Why not pursue him first?"

"No—I don't wish to do that. Cannot you see how much more it will be to our advantage if we can feel sure that Edgworth Bess is in a place of safety?"

"It will."

"We should then be free from all anxiety on her account, and be able to turn the whole of our attention to a pursuit of Jonathan Wild. By not having her to look after, we shall be very much more likely to succeed than when our attention was divided."

"I can see the force of that."

"Well, then, if you like, I will call on the Lord Chancellor to-night."

"It is a bold idea, Jack."

"Not for me. I have done bolder things than this."

"True."

"You can either accompany me into his residence—that is, supposing I am able to gain admission—or you may wait outside on the watch. Which do you think would be the best plan?"

"I don't know. I will keep watch on the outside willingly, if you wish—and yet I think by lingering about one place for a length of time I should run a risk of being recognised."

"So you would—I forgot that. We had better both go in together, and you will be able to bear out the truth of what I say."

"Exactly. But there is one difficulty which I fancy you did not foresee."

"What is that?"

"In making your disclosures to the Lord Chancellor, how shall you manage to preserve your identity as a secret?"

"Of course it would not do to say who I am."

"Of course not,—that would be certain destruction. Nor could I say who I am."

"That is a difficulty."

"It is, because, if we give false names and we are found out, we may be the means of getting Edgworth Bess into trouble, and discredit may be thrown upon our whole story."

"We must chance all that, Blueskin. My mind is fully made up. I consider it is our duty to make known all that we are acquainted with."

"I am quite willing, Jack, for I feel that when my old master's daughter is instated in her proper position the chief purpose of my life will have been achieved."

"Come on, then! Why do you hesitate? We were always careless about danger, and why should we change now? Come on! Don't stay to have any further thoughts about it!"

"I will not; but we must get this matter over quickly, and then—for a time, at any rate—forget it, and turn the whole of our attention to Jonathan Wild. If we are not careful, he will succeed in leaving England, and then who knows whether he will ever be brought to justice?"

"As soon as ever it is possible," said Jack, "I will set out on this excursion. Nothing, save what has occurred to-night, would have made me change my purpose."

"I fancy not."

"But is it not your opinion that the disclosures we shall be able to make, if we can see the Lord Chancellor, will be sufficient to cause him to take Edgworth Bess under his protection?"

"I hope it will."

"If so, we shall be free from any fear on her account. She will be safe, and no source of anxiety to us."

While this conversation was going forward, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard were rapidly making their way in the direction of the residence of the Lord Chancellor.

Jack had obtained the address from the foot of the bill.

At last they paused before a mansion, and ere they attempted to knock for admission they by instinct proceeded to reconnoitre it.

The first thing that attracted their attention was that none of the windows were lighted up, but from one on the first floor a faint glimmer came, as though within there was some lamp which burned with a subdued lustre.

All around seemed very silent,—not a single living creature was in sight; and, reassured by this, our friends ascended the steps leading to the wide doorway.

They hesitated, listened again, and then finally Jack Sheppard summoned up his courage, and seizing the knocker, gave a vigorous rat-rat.

CHAPTER DXI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD HAVE AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW WITH THE LORD CHANCELLOR.

No notice was taken of Jack's summons for admission, and so, after waiting a little while, he knocked again.

This time the door opened, and a sudden alteration took place in the countenance of the domestic, who stood upon the threshold, when he saw who the late visitors were.

He was about to slam the door to in their faces, and would have done so had not Jack adroitly slipped into the hall just in time.

"I want to see the Lord Chancellor at once!" he said, in a loud voice.

"Oh, goodness!—the very hidea! What will things come to next, I wonder? Do you think 'is lordship can be disturbed by the likes of you?"

"Tell him that we are here. We must see him."

"Must? Very good!"

"Tell him that we are here."

"Now, hark you, my fine fellow," said the servant,—

"I don't want to kick hup a row, nor soil my fingers by touching you, but if you don't quit the house at once I'll call the police."

"No, you won't! Tell the Chancellor I am here with the information that he offers a hundred pounds reward for."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you say that at once, confound you? Come in 'ere. Thomas," he added, addressing one of his

fellow-servants, "go and tell 'is lordship that these two persons 'ave brought the information."

Thomas ascended the stairs, and almost immediately came down again, and desired Blueskin and Jack to follow him.

Our two friends felt strangely enough in that magnificent abode, and while they were determined to go on, yet they felt the strangest desire to retreat.

Thomas led the way to the door of a chamber, which he opened, and ushered them into a luxuriously-furnished apartment, on the centre table of which a lamp was burning.

Seated at this table was a cadaverous-looking man about fifty years of age.

Before him was spread a quantity of papers, and he had evidently been engaged in writing, for he laid his pen down and desired his visitors to be seated and state their business.

While he spoke the words, he rose to his feet and removed the green shade from the lamp by which the light was concentrated upon the table.

As soon as he did so, the whole of the apartment was lighted up, and he was able to see our two friends distinctly.

He did not recognise them, nor did he appear to see anything peculiar in their exterior.

He leaned back in his chair, and fixing his eyes upon them, waited for them to commence.

"We are here," said Jack, speaking in a hushed voice, "in consequence of having seen a bill offering a reward of one hundred pounds."

"And do you bring the desired information?"

"We do, my lord."

"Proceed, then."

"The girl you want is called Edgworth Bess. I know where she is, and can either take your lordship to her or bring her here."

"You can?" ejaculated the Lord Chancellor. "Then how is it that you have not made your appearance here before? Why have you kept back your knowledge until this moment?"

"Because we have only just seen the bills."

"How is that?"

"We have been absent from England for some time, and so has Edgworth Bess. We only returned a week ago, and I did not see your bill until to-night, about an hour since. I fancied it had only just been posted up."

"A second supply of bills went out this morning—but that does not matter. You say you have been away from England, and that's the reason you knew nothing of all this?"

"That is the reason, my lord."

"Then you are friends of this girl?"

"Well, not exactly that, my lord,—we are only acquainted with her."

"Why did she leave England?"

"To escape Jonathan Wild."

"That sounds reasonable, and you have clearly earned the reward as soon as ever you say where the girl is to be found. In the first place, however, do you know anything of her early history?"

"Very little, my lord."

"Still, tell me what you do know."

Jack thereupon described how, when he first became acquainted with Edgworth Bess, she worked as a shroud-maker at the house of a woman named Roblet—how an attack had been made upon her—and followed up with a brief description of all those facts in connection with the young girl with which the reader is already acquainted.

When he concluded, there was an evident expression of satisfaction upon the countenance of the Lord Chancellor.

All that Jack had stated entirely corresponded with the account that had been furnished by Steggs, so there could be no doubt about the identity of the heiress.

Lord Donnull had confessed how he had caused his brother's only child to be kidnapped by a villain in his employ—how he had offered this man a reward to slay the infant—and then described how it had afterwards come to his knowledge that the man had not kept his word; he had received the money, but his brother's child still lived.

It will be recollected that it was Steggs who heard the dying confession made by the man Williams, who stated

the child he was to have murdered was now grown up into a woman, and was working as a shroud-maker at Mrs. Roblet's.

Everything was quite correct.

"There is only one thing that I desire to know," said the Lord Chancellor,—“that is, your name.”

Jack paused, but Blueskin came to his assistance.

"My name is Joseph Blake, and the reason I take an interest in this affair I will now show to you.

"When I was a very young man—about eighteen years of age—I lived as a servant with Lord Donnull, the father of the girl about whom we are talking."

"Indeed!" said the Chancellor, with redoubled interest.

"Go on with your story,—you may have important information."

"I think not, my lord," said Blueskin. "When this little girl was born, Abel Donnull—the one who usurped his brother's title—was on the best of terms with the brother he so cruelly injured. He was in the house when the child was born. The mother died. Time passed on, and the child disappeared. Abel appeared to feel the loss as deeply as his brother, and was unsparing in his exertions to discover what had become of the lost little one. He alone knew where she was. He had bribed a man to murder the little infant, and succeeded, with diabolical ingenuity, in fixing suspicion upon myself and one of my fellow-servants, who was my friend.

"There was nothing but suspicion against us, however. With all his cleverness, Abel was powerless to bring any proofs against us. Still, he raised the doubt, and we were dismissed from the service of our much-loved master."

"What you say is quite true," said the Chancellor. "I do not know whether you are aware of it, but the Abel Donnull of whom you are speaking is dead. He left behind him a full confession, and what you have just said is embodied in it."

"Then perhaps my story will be believed now; but it is too late. I have suffered under that doubt for the whole of my life, and now I shall not benefit by its removal. However, that is neither here nor there. I made up my mind, when I was discharged, to try and find the child; but years passed without my hearing anything of her, and so I came to the conclusion that she was dead. Accident alone brought her in my way. Since that time I have scarcely ever lost sight of her."

"You have earned your reward," said the Chancellor, "and something more. I am glad the lost heiress is found. The testimony you have given is so important, as corroborating other evidence, that you are entitled to something more. Within reason, you shall have all that you demand."

"We want no reward at all," said Blueskin. "What we have done has been merely out of affection to the persecuted girl. She has all the time been a victim to Jonathan Wild's villany, who hoped, by obtaining possession of her, to gain possession of the estates also."

"I know that."

"It is the truth, my lord, and what I have done has been to shelter her and protect her as much as I could from him. If, however, your lordship would interest yourself on my behalf, I have something to ask."

"Speak freely."

"Well, then, after I was discharged in the manner I described, I tried in vain to get a living by honest means. With such suspicion attaching to me, no one would employ me, and so I was forced either to starve or else to get my living in defiance of the laws."

"Then you wish to obtain a pardon?"

"I do, if it is possible. I have been guilty of many crimes, yet none serious, and many things are laid to my charge of which I am entirely innocent."

"You say your name is Joseph Blake?"

"Yes, that is my name, but I am better known by another."

"What is it?"

"Blueskin."

The Chancellor pushed his chair back, until the back came in contact with the wall; so there he stopped.

"Do not be alarmed, my lord," continued Blueskin. "I shall do you no harm. You will see no change in me after having made this declaration."

"But—but," stammered the Lord Chancellor, "you are sentenced to death!"

"I know that; but the evidence upon which I was

found guilty was that of Jonathan Wild, who was at once my witness and my prosecutor. I was saved from the gallows by little short of a miracle. Up to this moment I have kept myself clear of the officers. No one suspects me, and I could have kept my secret much longer. I could have kept it even from you, but I did not fear making the disclosure to you, because you would not take advantage of it. You would not call in the police officers to arrest me?"

"No—no!" said the Chancellor. "I cannot say that I should!"

"I knew that, and so I spoke. I escaped to a foreign land, and might have remained there in safety to the end of my days, but I returned simply that I might endeavour to place the heiress in her true position."

The Chancellor was silent for some moments, and then he said:

"Your conduct does you great credit. I will inquire into what you have said."

"You will find it all true," said Blueskin—"every word of it. When I leave here no one will know me. When I have seen the heiress once under your protection, I shall be content. I shall depart, and no one probably will hear of me again. If, however, your lordship thinks proper to interest yourself to obtain my pardon, you may depend I shall come forward as soon as ever it is proclaimed."

"I will try to obtain it," said the Lord Chancellor. "Whether I succeed, is more than I can say. I must make further inquiry."

"Do so, your lordship, and that is the only reward I crave."

"And your companion?"

"He desires nothing more."

"Does he desire a pardon?"

"No."

"Well, then, he shall have the reward. It has been promised, and it shall be paid. Now tell me where the girl is to be found."

Blueskin gave the address of the house in which they had taken lodgings in Westminster.

"This matter requires a little careful management," said the Lord Chancellor, with a smile. "Your position is peculiar. It will not do to confide your secret to another person. To betray you to your enemies, after the manner in which you have acted, would have been base to a degree."

"I felt sure your lordship would think so," said Blueskin.

"I do think so, and I will tell you how we can get out of the difficulty. I presume you will feel quite satisfied when I take the girl by the hand?"

"Quite satisfied, my lord."

"Well, then, I will tell you what I will do. I will call my carriage, and I will go with you to the address you have given. You can hand the girl over to me; you may see me place her in the carriage, and then I shall drive off. Will that content you?"

"Perfectly; there could not be a more admirable arrangement, or one better calculated to ensure my safety. I did not like to make so bold as to suggest it to your lordship."

The Lord Chancellor rang the bell, and, as soon as the servant appeared, he ordered his carriage to be got ready instantly.

There was a brief delay while the vehicle was being prepared, but the Lord Chancellor took advantage of the interval to make some further inquiries, but he elicited no fresh fact of any importance.

One thing was quite evident—he had not the least suspicion as to who Jack Sheppard really was.

At last the servant announced that the carriage was ready.

The Chancellor hastily donned his cloak and hat, and descended the staircase.

Our friends followed closely in his footsteps, concealing their countenances as well as they were able from the inquisitive glances which the servants in the hall below bent upon them.

The Lord Chancellor insisted upon Blueskin and Jack Sheppard entering the carriage with him.

It may seem strange that he did so, but he had a motive.

All they had said was straightforward enough, but still

he had no particular guarantee as to their good faith, but while they were in the carriage with him he knew that all was right.

He gave the requisite directions to the foolman, and the carriage was soon rolling rapidly along the dark, deserted streets in the direction of the house at Westminster.

CHAPTER DXII.

JOYATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES FIND THE PUBLIC-HOUSE TOO HOT TO HOLD THEM.

WE now return to Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes, the ex-Governor of Newgate.

It will be remembered that when we saw them last they were in a rather ticklish situation.

They were seated in a room in a public-house, along with many other persons, when they heard the clattering sound produced by the sudden halt of several horsemen before the front door.

The man who had been addressed as Luke had said that they were police officers outside, in search of Wild and Noakes, and that they, the officers, had stopped him, and announced their intention of searching all the public-houses in the vicinity.

This was alarming news for Wild, and he was, for a moment at least, completely taken aback.

As for Mr. Noakes, he seemed ready to expire with terror, and he gasped for breath in a manner that could scarcely fail to attract the attention of those who sat near him.

Jonathan glanced into his companion's countenance with the utmost scorn, and then he rose to his feet.

He grasped Mr. Noakes by the collar, saying, in a rapid and impressive whisper:

"Follow me, and you will be safe!"

These few words were uttered with the utmost confidence, and consequently they had a great and immediate effect upon Mr. Noakes.

To a certain extent he forgot his fears, and shook off his shrinking timidity.

He rose, and followed Wild across the room.

As soon as ever the two comrades in iniquity moved, the eyes of all the company were turned full upon them.

Jonathan looked steadily towards the door.

"Hallo!" said Luke, in a loud voice, springing from his seat as he spoke, "I'm blest if I don't think the varmint are here! Help me! Here is Jonathan Wild!"

Mr. Noakes uttered a loud yell, and gave himself up for lost.

With an oath, Wild drew his sword and made a slash at the oil lamp hanging from the centre of the ceiling, and whence most of the illumination proceeded.

It was only suspended by a rope, and Wild's sword divided it instantly.

Down came the lamp with a fearful crash, and then the chamber was plunged into comparative darkness.

The thief-taker well knew that a certain amount of confusion and dismay would be produced by this proceeding, and he was in readiness to take advantage of it.

Seizing hold of Mr. Noakes, he dragged him into the passage.

But just at this moment, the police officers, having dismounted from their steeds, poured in at the front door of the inn.

They were able to see at a glance that something of an unusual and suspicious character was going on.

"Forward!" cried the one in command.

There was an oil lamp hanging in the passage, and by the aid of this they saw Wild and Noakes running at full speed, and they called out for them to stay.

But, discouraged by the success which he had met with in his attack on the other lamp, Wild made a desperate cut at this one.

Down it came at once, to the consternation of all.

Mr. Noakes was almost paralysed with fear, and it was a great trouble to Wild to drag him along.

It may seem strange that Jonathan should choose to encumber himself with anyone; on the contrary, one would think he would have left him to his fate, and turned all his energy and attention towards making

his own escape. But he had a motive for what he was doing, as will be seen in the sequel,—the ex-Governor was too valuable to be parted with easily.

So, much against his inclination, Mr. Noakes was compelled to accompany his companion in crime.

Jonathan dragged him into the yard at the back of the inn.

Just as he passed out of the back door, Wild perceived two men run hastily across the road in the direction of the gates.

From their manner, the thief-taker came at once to the conclusion that they had been stealing something, and that his sudden appearance had disturbed them.

At the very same time that he came to this conclusion, he saw how he might turn this fortuitous occurrence to his own advantage.

He glanced round for some place of concealment,—he required somewhere to hide in quickly, before the officers could recover from the confusion caused by the fall of the lamp.

His eye rested on a flight of wooden steps, which seemed to lead up to a loft.

These he resolved to ascend, and no sooner did he determine to do so than he compelled his companion to follow him.

The wooden steps were only about twelve in number, so the top was soon reached.

Wild found himself standing upon a small, square, wooden platform.

Just in front of him was a door.

He pushed it, and found it yield to his touch.

He passed through quickly, and closed the door behind him.

He was only just in time, for the officers came pouring into the yard.

They heard and saw the two men running that Wild had disturbed, and, as the thief-taker imagined, they jumped at once to the conclusion that these were the two men they wanted.

Uttering a loud cry, they rushed onwards, and the two thieves, finding themselves pursued, ran off with redoubled speed.

The officers followed, and in less than a minute the whole were out of sight.

The room, at the top of the steps, into which Jonathan Wild had intruded was situated over the brewhouse in the rear of the inn, and was used for storing malt.

Many bags of this article were contained in this place, and the fugitives would not have had much trouble in concealing themselves among them had a close search been made.

But for this there was no necessity, for the officers never came near.

Wild went to the window and looked out.

He saw the officers run across the yard and disappear.

He uttered a low chuckle.

Mr. Noakes was by this time half dead with fright, and had sunk upon the sacks quite helpless.

Jonathan shook him violently.

"Escaped again!" he said—"escaped again! Get up, you fool! We have nothing to fear! I tell you we have escaped again!"

Mr. Noakes only groaned.

"Come on!" continued Wild. "We can't stop here; it isn't likely! We must get further away, or the officers may discover their mistake and return!"

"I will give up," said the ex-Governor. "I would sooner die at once than live a life of terror like this—I would sooner die at once!"

"Would you?"

"I would indeed!"

"Then I don't intend to allow you the opportunity! This way, I say! Ha!—we have lingered too long!—the officers are returning!"

Mr. Noakes collapsed again.

Jonathan seized him again by the collar, and made him stand upon his feet.

The thief-taker was perfectly correct when he said that the officers were returning.

By dint of hard running, they had managed to come up with and to capture the two men.

They saw directly that they had made a mistake, and called upon the prisoners for an explanation.

One of them then stated that they were about to steal

some malt out of the malt-room, and had already got the door open for the purpose, when they were disturbed by two men coming into the yard, and had run off in the hope of being able to make their escape.

Upon hearing this statement, the commanding police officer uttered an oath.

He saw well enough how the mistake had been made, and hastily returned to the inn yard, for he was not altogether devoid of the hope that he should even yet be in time to secure those he so much desired to capture.

Jonathan, however, acted with great promptitude and resolution.

Through the window of the malt-room there came a faint, feeble kind of light, and by the aid of this Jonathan was able to see about him, for his eyes had grown accustomed to the obscurity.

Up in the roof Jonathan could see a trap-door. He was able to distinguish it because it did not fit properly into its frame, and in consequence he could see a faint line of light running round it.

Through this he determined to make his way, but as a preliminary step he secured the door through which he had entered, and then with inconceivable rapidity piled up a number of sacks of malt before it.

He viewed his work with great satisfaction, but he had hardly finished when the officers, having searched the yard and guarded all the outlets from it, ascended the flight of wooden steps.

When the officer reached the door and found it fast, he was forced to come to one of two conclusions.

Either the man he had captured had not spoken the truth, or else those he wanted had concealed themselves in the place and fastened the door.

This was the most pleasing view of the case, and so the officer adopted it.

"Down with this door!" he cried,—"*the rascals are inside, and have fastened it!*"

While they were attacking the door, Wild was busily engaged.

He found that the trap-door was situated just above a malt-mill.

To climb on to the top of this mill was by no means difficult, and by standing on the upper portion of it he was able to reach the trap-door.

He lifted it off in a moment, and seizing hold, with both hands, of the frame into which it fitted, Jonathan drew himself up on to the roof.

"Now, Noakes," he cried, "up with you! Make haste!"

"I cannot!"

"Fool, you must! I am at liberty above! Climb up on the mill, and all will be well! Quick, I say, and be silent!"

Somehow or other, Mr. Noakes felt compelled to obey Wild's imperious commands; so he climbed up on to the top of the malt-mill with more agility than one would have thought he was in possession of.

Having reached so far, Jonathan helped him up on to the roof.

The officers were still hammering at the door. They could not get it down, in consequence of the sacks of malt that Wild had piled up against the inner side of it.

When he got out upon the roof, Wild seemed as far from safety as ever, for there was no means visible by which he could descend.

But the thief-taker did not despair.

On the contrary, he was overjoyed at having succeeded so far, and augured from it that he should complete his escape.

With admirable presence of mind he replaced the trap-door, so as to leave no more trace behind him than he could help, and then crawled along the tiles in the hope of being able to find some point from which he might descend in safety.

Mr. Noakes followed him with great difficulty.

The villain was in mortal fear that he should fall to the ground, his feet slipped so when he tried to crawl along after his companion.

Mr. Noakes was unused to these adventures, and they were a great punishment to him.

Of course all will say that it served him right.

In this we cordially agree.

Wild looked about him, but was still unable to see how he was to descend.



[JONATHAN WILD FELS THE TOLL-KEEPER WITH HIS BLUDGEON.]

He made the entire circuit of the roof of the malt-room, and there was only one side which furnished him with the smallest particle of hope.

Here it seemed madness to attempt to get down, for it was some distance to the ground.

About half-way, however, there was another roof, and Wild's scheme was to lower himself down until he hung the full length of his arms, and then drop upon it.

Mr. Noakes trembled at the idea.

But Jonathan was inexorable, and compelled him to lower himself at the same time as he did.

"Now," he cried, in a suppressed voice—"now let go, and be d—d to you!"

He saw Mr. Noakes let go his hold, and as soon as he did so he permitted his own fingers to relax.

Down they both fell with alarming velocity.

Then there was a crash—a frightful crash, which was enough to alarm everyone within a mile of the place.

Then came a shriek.

This was from the lips of Mr. Noakes.

No. 108.—BLUESKIN.

In looking down on the roof below, Jonathan had failed to notice that in the centre of it was a skylight.

Full upon this did both he and Mr. Noakes fall.

This produced the crash.

After passing through the skylight and utterly demolishing it, they came down upon a table, or some similar article.

It was this that had wrung the shriek of pain from Mr. Noakes.

Both were partially stunned, but Wild was the first to recover himself.

He seized his companion, who was almost breathless.

"Come on!" he said. "It won't do to linger here; and I don't intend to suffer myself to be made prisoner after running all these risks and enduring all these hurts to procure my liberty! This way, I say!"

"I am done for, Mr. Wild."

"Bah!"

"I cannot go any further."

"You must!"

"I cannot."

Jonathan dragged him forward.

"Idiot," he cried, "you would succumb just when you are safe! Look, here is the door—here is the open air. We have got the level ground beneath our feet, and shall be able to make good speed!"

Mr. Noakes was rather encouraged by these words and the open door, so he staggered onwards.

"It's no good," he cried before they had gone many yards. "Look, here they come! They will capture us after all!"

Wild uttered an oath.

Looking back, he saw the police officers coming on at a rapid rate from the direction of the inn.

CHAPTER DXIII.

JONATHAN WILD ELUDES THE OFFICERS BY PRACTISING A CLEVER STRATAGEM.

JONATHAN WILD and Mr. Noakes were in a kind of kitchen garden surrounding the building upon which they had fallen, and as they looked across it they saw the police officers running at the top of their speed.

The terrific crash caused by the demolition of the sky-light was quite enough to let the officers know that the prisoners were making an escape, and to direct them to the spot, and the brief interval of time during which Jonathan Wild and his companion lay half stunned upon the table had been sufficient to enable the police officers to hurriedly descend the steps and make their way round into the garden.

A loud shout which they set up indicated that they had caught sight of the fugitives, and now that it came to a fair run over ground, they did not doubt for a moment that they should succeed in capturing them.

Wild seized hold of Mr. Noakes by the hand, and both ran onwards at a wonderful rate; but then they were both flying for their lives, and under such circumstances men will make very great exertions indeed.

Mr. Noakes shook off some portion of his fears, and bent all his energies upon running as swiftly as he could, and he was further encouraged by Wild, who continually urged him to make more speed.

Chance seemed to favour them to a very great extent, for without making a single false step they traversed the garden, broke through a hedge, crossed a meadow, and then, after leaping a ditch, found themselves in another field.

The police officers, however, were not so fortunate, and they also tried as well as they could to keep together.

There were many good runners among them, but the others were indifferent, and those who could run swiftly did not possess sufficient courage to attack Jonathan Wild single-handed.

They had all got a kind of superstitious fear of the man; and well they might have, for his deeds in the past had been quite sufficient to make the boldest hearts tremble.

To these circumstances, then, may be attributed the ease with which the thief-taker contrived to out-distance his pursuers.

Had one of the police officers been bold enough to run forward and seize him, and wait till his companions came up, Wild's fate would have been sealed, but in all probability the officer would have forfeited his life for the attempt, and there was not one magnanimous enough to feel inclined to sacrifice his life that his comrades might reap the benefit of the reward.

Moving in a compact body, almost as a small body of soldiers, they hastened after Wild.

The speed at which they went was one that they would be able to maintain for a considerable length of time, and eventually they might run the fugitives down, but in the meantime there was a danger that they would be able to double upon their course, or conceal themselves somewhere, or otherwise throw them off the scent.

"On—on!" cried Wild, panting for breath between every word. "We are distancing them rapidly! We shall soon be out of their reach altogether! On—on!"

Mr. Noakes tried to speak, but his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth; his knees trembled beneath him, and he felt for a moment as though he must inevitably sink to the ground.

Had not Wild retained his grasp upon his hand, and so dragged him onwards, the probability is that he would have done so.

Encouraged by his success so far, Jonathan Wild seemed to receive at every step a fresh accession of strength, and he bounded on in a manner that was really wonderful to behold.

Every now and then he would turn round and look back upon the way he had come, and each time he saw that his pursuers were further off.

Then, suddenly breaking through a hedge, the two fugitives rolled down a bank and found themselves in the high-road.

Wild scrambled to his feet and assisted the Governor to rise.

"Quick!" he said—"be quick, I say, or we shall lose the advantage which we have gained with so much difficulty! Up!—up! We can run along this road at a good speed!"

Once again, then, they resumed their flight, Jonathan Wild running as fresh and unexhausted as though he had not run a yard.

Mr. Noakes, however, was scarcely able to drag one leg after the other, and Wild, looking at him, was aware that it was quite useless to expect that he would be able to run for a much greater space of time.

It was necessary, then, that he should find some hiding-place, and devise some means by which he could throw his pursuers off the scent.

This seemed an impossible task; but whenever there was a difficulty, Wild seemed to rise superior to it.

He found how rapidly his companion's strength was leaving him, and so he said:

"One more effort—only one more effort! Be quick, and then we shall be able to rest—the danger will be past! The officers are not in sight; they have missed us somehow; but they may soon find us—that is, if we do not hide! Come on, I say, and in a few minutes I will find you an excellent hiding-place!"

The prospect of an escape and the hope of being able to elude his pursuers, and, above all, of obtaining a rest, operated as a stimulant upon the Governor's physical powers, and he ran hastily along by the side of his companion.

The road curved round to the right; and upon passing round this bend, Wild suddenly came in sight of a toll-gate.

It was placed quite across the road, and the gates were shut.

The moment he saw it, a fresh thought darted into his mind, and he glanced back to make sure the officers were not in sight.

Not a vestige of them was to be seen, however, and, with a chuckle, the thief-taker said:

"All right, Noakes, my boy—I shall do them at last. Slacken your speed a little and recover your breath, for I shall want you to speak."

Mr. Noakes willingly obeyed this command, and in a moment afterwards Wild stopped at the toll-gate.

He clutched Mr. Noakes by the arm and whispered in his ear:

"Knock at the door of the toll-house, and when the keeper appears tell him that you have lost your way. Ask him the road to London—get him out of the house by some means or other, and leave the rest to me!"

Mr. Noakes nodded, and Wild concealed himself in the shadow of the toll-house.

The Governor knocked at the door, and it was immediately opened by the tollman, who unsuspectingly stepped out on to the footpath.

He looked rather surprised upon seeing Mr. Noakes, and gruffly asked what he wanted.

But ere he could frame a reply, Jonathan Wild, who was on the watch, crept behind the toll-keeper unobserved.

He had his thick heavy bludgeon raised in the air, for he had kept possession of it during his recent adventures.

He brought it down with a sickening crash upon the head of the toll-keeper, who fell like a log into the road.

Mr. Noakes was overcome with horror when he saw this deed perpetrated, for it had come upon him quite unexpectedly.

Just then, however, a trampling of footsteps became

audible, and Wild, who was about to give vent to his exultation in one of his hideous laughs, stopped short and looked in the direction he had just come.

"The officers are here!" he said. "Be quick, or after all we shall be caught! Into the toll-house with you, and leave the rest to me!"

With the greatest fright depicted on his countenance, the Governor obeyed, and Wild, stooping down, seized hold of the insensible body of the tollman, and by an effort of strength dragged him inside the little wooden house, and closed the door.

With the rapidity of lightning he tore off the upper portion of the clothes which the toll-keeper wore and placed them over his own garments.

He had just finished when there came a tremendous banging at the door.

The interior of the toll-house was quite dark, and in an impressive whisper Wild said:

"On your life, keep still!—do not speak or move, or our lives will pay the forfeit!"

At the same moment he flung open the upper portion of the toll-house door, which was so formed that the lower half could remain closed and bolted while the upper half was open.

"Hallo there! What's the matter?"

The officers were all clustered round the gate, and one of them said:

"Have you seen a couple of men run past this place?"

"No, I have not," returned Wild, in the same tones and with perfect self-possession. "The door was shut; how could I?"

So perfectly did he perform the part he had so suddenly assumed that the police officers had not the slightest suspicion of the actual state of affairs, and the one who had before spoken added:

"Well, the place is quiet enough, and perhaps if you have not seen them you have heard them?"

"Ah! that's another thing altogether," said the toll-keeper. "About two minutes ago, I should say—or perhaps it might be three—I heard somebody run past the door, and off down the road; but whether there was one man or two, or whether there was a woman among them, is more than I can tell you."

"But you heard footsteps, you say?"

"Oh yes, quite plainly!"

"And some one was running?"

"Yes, and at a wonderful speed, too, I can tell you; they seemed to be out of hearing in less than no time."

"Can you tell which way they went?"

"No, not for certain."

"Which way do you think? I will tell you why we ask. We are police officers, and are in search of that notorious villain Jonathan Wild and his companion, the late Governor of Newgate. We have tracked them thus far, but have lost sight of them."

"Jonathan Wild, did you say?" exclaimed the thief-taker, with well-affected astonishment. "Do you mean to say that Jonathan Wild is down about these parts?"

"Yes, that he is, for certain! We almost had our hands on him once, but he slipped through our fingers."

"Oh, law! I wish you had not told me. I shall be afraid to sleep in my bed now, for I sleep in this place all by myself. I should not wonder if Jonathan Wild was to cut my throat!"

"I think he will have quite enough to do in looking after his own safety," said the officer; "but it is no good stopping here, we are losing valuable time. If you can tell us which way the people you heard pass by appeared to be running, you will render us a good service."

"Well," said Wild, "if what I tell you don't turn out to be true you must not blame me, because I didn't see them, you know; but I heard 'em, and I might go so far as to say that I would take my oath that they ran straight on down the road."

"That will do; and now, Mr. Tollman, one word more."

"What is it, sir?"

"If Jonathan Wild and the man who is with him should turn back and think to escape us that way, you get your blunderbuss ready, and if they run by your house shoot them with it!"

"All right, Mr. Officer; but will you stand by me for doing it?"

"Certainly! my orders are to take them dead or alive—
—you understand?"

"Quite."

"Then forward, my lads! it seems we are on the right track after all, and this bit of a rest has allowed us to recover our breath. If we keep on their trail we must bring them down sooner or later. Come on—follow me! I wish with all my heart that we had our horses with us!"

As he spoke these words the officer set off at a sharp trot, and the others followed at his heels.

Wild watched them until their forms were lost to view in the darkness, and then closing the door, he said:

"Now, Noakes, what do you think of that?"

"Wonderful!" was the gasping reply.

"What would you do without me, I wonder?" continued Wild, with great self-compacency. "You would have been captured long ere this."

"I should—I should; but I can't stand this sort of thing long, my constitution won't bear up against it. Can't we get right away from England, and give them the slip altogether?"

"Yes," said Wild, "that's what I intend to do, but I have a little business on hand which I must transact first. When that is done we will go, and then we can pass the remainder of our days in absolute safety."

"What business is it?" asked the Governor, with a whine.

"Nothing to you—it will be time enough for you to know when you see it. Wasn't it a bold plan to take possession of this house and act the toll-keeper?"

"It was! I didn't know you were going behind him like that—you gave me quite a turn. I believe you have killed him."

"And what does it matter if I have?" said Wild. "He will only make one more. Serve the fool right—we shall have no more trouble with him!"

As he spoke, a faint smothered groan came upon his ears.

CHAPTER DXIV.

JONATHAN WILD PLAYS THE PART OF A TOLL-KEEPER TO GREAT PERFECTION.

"Who's that?" said Wild.

"Not me," returned the Governor.

"Then it is our friend the tollman, not dead yet. I see he is bent upon giving us some trouble. Where is he?"

"On the floor."

"Stick the corner of my felt hat into his mouth, then, and make him hold his noise! If the officers should happen to return, all will be discovered."

Another groan came.

"Why don't you do it?" cried Wild.

"I cannot!"

"Cowardly fool! You would get us into trouble on such a point as this? Where is my hat?"

Jonathan groped about in the darkness, and found the object of which he was in search.

It was close beside the prostrate body of the unfortunate toll-keeper.

Rolling it up into the smallest possible compass, he thrust it violently into his half-opened mouth.

The tollman was just recovering his consciousness, but he now stood in imminent danger of suffocation.

Scarcely had he done this than Wild's quick ear caught the sound of horses' hoofs.

He started, and for a moment his heart beat violently.

But regaining his calmness almost instantly, he said:

"There's somebody else coming! Can you hear them?"

Mr. Noakes was too terrified to reply.

"Hark! Can you hear the clatter of horses' hoofs? They are coming on at a gallop!"

"What is to be done?" gasped the Governor.

"Leave it to me. All you have to do is to remain perfectly silent, and to take care that that fellow on the floor don't make an outcry. If he does, the rope is as good as round your neck—so beware!"

"But what shall you do?"

"I shall have to open the gate for them, I suppose. I wonder where the devil he kept the key of the padlock?"

Wild searched in the pockets of the garments he had so

hastily donned, and almost immediately discovered a bunch of keys.

There were several on an iron ring, and which was the right key, or whether any one of them was right, he could not tell.

Any bungling, however, would be fatal, and he knew it.

He had no further time for search or reflection.

With a dash, the troop of horsemen drew up before the toll-gate.

A succession of sharp knocks were rained upon the door.

Wild waited a moment to make sure that all was right, and then opened it.

"Hullo!" he said, disguising his voice in the same way as before. "What's the matter?"

"Open the gate, and be quick about it!" said the voice. "We are in a hurry."

"All right, sir! I'll attend to you in one moment."

"Now!" said the voice. "We are officers, and can't wait! We are in pursuit of Jonathan Wild!"

"Then I'll open the gate for you with all the pleasure in the world!" said Wild, and anyone to have heard him speak would have fully believed that he meant just what he said.

So saying, he opened the lower half of the door, and, taking care to bolt it after him, went to the gate with the bunch of keys in his hand.

"I believe Jonathan Wild and that chap he has got with him went past here only a little while ago," he said.

Choosing a key at random, he thrust it into the lock, or rather tried to do so, for it was much too large.

"Indeed!" said the police officer who had formerly spoken. "What grounds have you for believing that?"

"Why, some more police officers on foot passed by only a little while ago. They have gone straight on down the road. If you make haste you will overtake them!"

During this speech, Wild had tried three more keys, but with no better success than at first.

Yet he spoke with perfect calmness, though a cold perspiration broke out upon his forehead as he wondered whether he should be detected by simply being unable to unlock the gate.

The officer did not notice his fumbling, so interested was he in the conversation.

"Did you speak to these officers?" he said.

"Oh, yes!" replied Wild, with an inward curse as he tried another key and failed again. "They asked me if I had seen two men run by. I told them no, for I had not; but I said I had heard some one running past, and so they concluded that Jonathan Wild had gone on further down the road."

"No doubt of it," said the officer; "and as we are on horseback we shall soon come up with them, and in all probability capture the villain. Why the devil don't you open the gate?"

"I am opening it, sir," said Wild, almost in despair, and in his confusion trying the same keys over again.

"You've been long enough, in all conscience. What are you doing?—why don't you unlock it?"

"It's the wrong key."

"The wrong key!" repeated the officer. "You're a don-key, you mean!"

The officer was fond of a joke, and at times perpetrated some horrible ones.

The men under him, however, always laughed to the utmost, and Jonathan Wild, taking his cue from them, roared more heartily than any, and, desisting from his attempt upon the lock, he pretended to hold his sides, and fairly shook with laughter.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he cried. "Well, that's good—it's the best thing I have heard for many a long day! What a wit you must have, to be sure! Wrong-key—don-key! That's very good!"

Of course the officer was pleased to see the toll-keeper enjoy his jest so much, and he grew quite good-tempered.

At last their laughter subsided, and the officer said:

"Now, my good man, make haste and open the gate!"

"All right, sir! I've got the right key this time, but, you see, there's a lot on the bunch, and when you rode up, the fact is I was fast asleep, and not being properly awake was the reason I could not tell one key from another."

"All right! Make haste, I say, because every moment is of the greatest importance."

The key which he now held in his hand was Jonathan's last hope.

If that failed to do its office he would be obliged to confess his inability to open the gate, when suspicion would be at once excited, and discovery ensue.

It was really wonderful how, under such trying circumstances, he could preserve his self-possession at all; but he did preserve it, and in a most admirable manner.

Not the faintest shadow of a suspicion entered the officer's mind.

Who could imagine Jonathan's feelings when about to try this key, and when he knew how serious the consequences of failure would be?

His heart stood still, and then suddenly commenced to beat at a fearful rate as he found the key slip easily into the keyhole.

He turned it round, and the wards yielded.

"It's all right now, sir," he said, as he pushed the gate open. "It was not the wrong key, after all. Some rascal must have put something into the keyhole. However, it's all right now."

The officers, who were impatient at the delay, now that they learned Jonathan Wild was only a little before them on the road, without speaking another word, trotted swiftly through the gate.

With perfect coolness, Jonathan Wild closed it after them, and locked it.

He then made his way into the toll-house.

"Where are you, Noakes?"

"Here, Mr. Wild," replied the Governor, in a trembling voice.

"You heard what took place, didn't you?"

"Yes, every word."

"Then there's another danger over; but I think we had better leave this place at once. If we stay in it much longer, it will be too hot to hold us."

"With all my heart," said Mr. Noakes. "I shall be glad indeed to leave it."

"Come on, then! I will show you how I shall throw these officers off the scent!"

Mr. Noakes was glad enough to emerge on to the high-road, for the company of the toll-keeper in that little house was far from being agreeable to him.

But he was horrorstruck when he found Wild turned in the direction of London.

"Where are you going?" he asked, in the greatest fear.

"Are you mad?"

"Not a bit of it."

"But this is the way to London!"

"I know that."

"Surely you wouldn't go there?"

"Listen to me! Have we not been in the greatest peril?—and have not I found an easy way out of it in every case?"

"You have. You're a wonderful man, Mr. Wild!"

"Never mind that. Let the success I have had up to the present be a guarantee for you in the future. You will find it easiest to place yourself implicitly in my hands, and do just as I direct."

The Governor was silent.

"I suppose you consent; but whether you do or do not, matters little. I shall not lose you, never fear. You will go wherever I choose to take you."

Jonathan took hold of his companion's arm as he spoke, and led him onwards at a rapid rate.

Mr. Noakes's terror increased as they drew nearer and nearer to London.

He ventured to make another remonstrance.

"Surely you will not go walking on? By the time we reach London it will be daylight! Look!—there is the east before us already. I can see indications of the coming dawn."

"So can I," growled Jonathan. "Who said I was going to London?"

"I thought you were."

"Well, wait and see."

Jonathan strode on, and soon the Governor began to recognise the various objects they met with.

At last they paused on the brink of the gravel-pit where they had already found safe shelter.

"Are you going down here again?"

"Yes. Go first—you know the way."

"I would rather follow."

"Go first, I say!"

"Very well—very well! I'll go first, if you wish it, of course."

"Go on, then, and I will follow in your footsteps. Now do you understand what I am going to do? This place has already afforded us safe refuge, and will do so again. They will not think of looking for us here, so much nearer to London. They will think, as a matter of course, that we shall try to get far away into the country. Go on, I say, and make no noise about it!—and mind you don't slip; if you do, you will not be worth picking up when you reach the bottom."

The descent into the gravel-pit was rugged and dangerous, and Mr. Noakes proceeded in continual terror of his life.

The bottom, however, was reached without the occurrence of any accident, and then Jonathan led the way to the little wooden shed under the roof of which they had before concealed themselves.

"Here we are," he said, "and here we shall be safe enough,—they will not find us here. We have had something to eat and drink, though we have had some peril in obtaining it. Now, lie down and rest, for when night comes you will find there will be fresh fatigue to undergo."

"Why keep me in the dark as to your intentions?" whined Mr. Noakes. "I am faithful—I would not betray you."

"Very likely, but I prefer to keep you in the dark—I have good reasons for doing so; besides, it is less trouble to yourself—you have not so much to think about. Now, lie down and go to sleep, and allow me to do the same. Don't bother me by talking."

Jonathan Wild flung himself down upon the damp ground which formed the floor of the hut, and Mr. Noakes, with a heavy sigh, followed his example.

"I can't stand this much longer," he said, "I am sure I can't! I'll kill him! Oh! what can I do for the best? How shall I escape from his clutches? Without him, I fear I should be captured instantly, and yet to remain in his company is worse than death. Let me think. If I was to kill him, or take him prisoner, perhaps they would pardon me. It is very likely. But how shall I do it? I might wait till he is asleep, and then beat his brains out with his own bludgeon. It is an effective weapon. I'll wait till he is asleep, and then I'll do it!"

"What the devil are you muttering about, Noakes?" asked the thief-taker, with an angry growl.

"Nothing—nothing!"

"Well, be quiet, for I want to go to sleep, and I can't while you are making that murmuring noise."

"I am silent, Mr. Wild,—I will be quite silent."

CHAPTER XXV.

JONATHAN WILD BEGINS TO FIND HIMSELF A VICTIM TO THE PANGS OF REMORSE.

MR. NOAKES lay profoundly still, keeping his thoughts to himself, and waiting patiently until his companion in crime should sink off into a sound slumber.

Jonathan did not speak again, and a silence that made the Governor feel anxious and uncomfortable pervaded the little shed.

After the lapse of about half an hour, which seemed to Mr. Noakes like a whole night, he determined to make the desperate attempt he had resolved upon, for during the time we have mentioned the thief-taker had neither moved nor uttered a sound.

Slowly and stealthily, Mr. Noakes raised himself to a sitting posture, and then remained perfectly still, in order to assure himself that as yet he had given no alarm.

The unbroken silence reassured him, and, by slow degrees, he got upon his feet.

Then, holding his breath, he ventured to take a

step nearer to the spot where Wild lay slumbering.

He could hear his heavy, stertorous breathing, and felt certain that all was well.

The intense darkness of the place, however, baffled him.

Not one single ray of light penetrated into the shed, and he was obliged to trust to his sense of touch alone for guidance.

It was necessary, first of all, that he should gain possession of the bludgeon.

This article he surmised would be lying somewhere near the thief-taker's right hand, so that he could seize it at any moment.

The heavy breathing indicated tolerably well where Wild lay, and at length Mr. Noakes paused, for he felt sure he was standing by his side.

Stooping down, he felt cautiously about him, and at length his fingers came in contact with Wild's coat.

Rapidly passing his hand upwards, he reached the shoulder, and then it was perfectly easy for him to follow the direction of the arm.

The Governor's spirits rose, for Jonathan Wild did not show the least signs of consciousness.

"I will not kill him," he thought. "I will hit him hard enough to deprive him of consciousness, then I will make him secure, and hand him over to the authorities."

As he came to this mental determination, Mr. Noakes laid his hand upon the thief-taker's bludgeon.

Jonathan held it tight in his grasp, and Mr. Noakes began to wonder whether he would be able to take it away without awaking him.

He pulled gently, and, to his joy, Wild's hand gently relaxed.

The next instant he was holding the bludgeon.

He knew just where the thief-taker's head was, and so he raised the formidable weapon in the air, with the intention of bringing it down with full force.

It was even in the act of descending, when he felt himself seized by the ankle, and with such force that he lost his footing and fell heavily to the earth.

Mr. Noakes almost expired with fright.

The first thing that came upon his senses was the harsh sound of the thief-taker's voice.

"Hallo, Noakes!" he said, "what are you about now? Thought to find me napping, did you? But I am not so easily caught. I have found you out, Noakes, so now beware!"

Wild got up, and the Governor shook fearfully from head to foot.

He made sure that his last moments had come, for that Jonathan would sacrifice him in his rage he had not the least doubt.

Jonathan grasped him by the collar.

"So you were going to knock my brains out, were you?" he said.

"No, no!" was the hurried reply—"I was not!"

"B you were, I say, and it is no good to deny it! When I heard you muttering, I knew you meant something, and that is why I kept myself on my guard; and a lucky thing it was for me, as things have turned out!"

"You are mistaken," said the Governor, hesitatingly.

"Mistaken be d—d!" said Wild,—"*it is too plain for that. I heard you creeping stealthily towards me, and pretended to be asleep, just to find out what you were going to do. I knew when you laid your hand upon the cudgel, but I wished to make quite sure of what you were about, and that's why I relaxed my fingers and allowed you to take possession of it. I stopped you just in time, for the bludgeon was descending. Can you deny that?*"

The Governor was silent.

"Of course you can't! And this is the return you make to me for having done you such important service as I have during this night. I have saved you from your enemies when I might have abandoned you to your fate and escaped myself. So far from doing so, I incurred an extra amount of danger by encumbering myself with you, and this is my reward. Villain, prepare for death! Before you quit life, you will wish a thousand times over that you had perished at Tyburn Tree!"

The Governor writhed about, and uttered frantic shrieks for mercy.

Wild took hold of the cudgel, and struck him a severe blow upon the shoulder with it, which made the Governor shriek out with real pain.

"That is the first instalment," said the thief-taker. "You shall suffer dearly for this! Wretch that you are, you would have murdered me in cold blood!"

"It's all a mistake!" persisted the Governor, with chattering teeth. "I tell you it is all a mistake! I never meant anything of the kind!"

"But I know better! What do you think I can do but slay you at once? My own safety demands it. If I could hand you over to the police, I would; but I can't do that without running my own neck into a noose; so I shall put you out of the world myself."

"Mercy—mercy!"

"Yes, you shall have just as much mercy as you intended to show to me. Now that I have discovered this, it will be impossible for us to remain longer in companionship together. I shall not be able to sleep in peace."

"Yes, you will, Mr. Wild. I will solemnly swear never to interrupt your rest again. Spare me this time—only this once! I was mad—I did not know what I was about! Have mercy! Spare me this time, and I will for ever afterwards be your most humble and devoted slave!"

"I can't attach any importance to your protestations," replied Wild—"I can't believe them. My own safety requires that you shall die!"

"No, no, Mr. Wild! I will confess that I had thought of disabling you and giving you into the custody of the officers, but if I had done such a thing I should have bitterly repented it; and although I am in such danger now, I rejoice that you should have prevented me from doing that which I should have regretted during the rest of my life."

"And if I spare you," said Wild, "what guarantee shall I have that you will not take the first opportunity you have to carry out your intention? No, no—I must slay you; and yet I wish that you had not forced me into the commission of this act. It will be so lonely for me without anyone to bear me company while I am hunted from place to place! You have served to rob solitude of its terrors, and that's why I aided and protected you; and, much as I dislike being by myself, yet it is much better that I should be than always be in momentary dread of the attack of an assassin."

"Oh, Mr. Wild!" said the Governor, piteously, "do reflect again! Do not you believe it possible that upon a sudden impulse a man should be tempted to do something, and then ever afterwards regret it? It is so with me, Mr. Wild. It is a great deal to ask your forgiveness for; but if you will look over this, I will be your slave for ever, and obey you in all things!"

"I would grant your request," said the thief-taker, "if I had any guarantee that would protect me from the risk I shall run."

"Think again. I will swear by the most solemn oath you think fit to impose, that I will never attempt anything against your life and liberty again!"

Wild paused.

"I will think it over," he said. "I confess I am undecided; but I am more likely to resolve upon your death than not; still, I will consider. Be prepared for the worst!"

Wild strode away, and seated himself upon the ground, with his back to the shed.

The attack which his companion had made upon him disconcerted him greatly.

For the future, he could never feel safe, for Jonathan Wild was not the man to put faith in the professions of anyone.

Yet the idea of parting company with the ex-Governor of Newgate was scarcely less disagreeable to him.

Wild had a horror of being alone.

This is always the case with guilty minds, and he had so many black and awful crimes upon his soul, and when he was alone they would so throng into his mind, that it made him anxious to have the society of anyone.

In being thus hunted about from place to place, as he had lately, Wild felt how dreadful it would be to be deprived of a companion.

It was chiefly this which had induced him to run so many risks by encumbering himself with Mr. Noakes, and he had never suspected for one moment that his life was in danger at his hands.

The Governor might be sincere, and might never make such an attempt again; but it seemed like tempting Providence too far to place any belief in what he said.

Yet, as Wild pondered the matter over, and as he tried to pierce the black darkness which surrounded him, he felt that he would rather run any risk than be alone, for that would be worse than a thousand deaths.

Mr. Noakes remained trembling in every limb, while Jonathan was making up his mind what he should do.

It was awful for anyone to be conscious that his life hung upon the caprice of a man like the thief-taker.

But the tenor of his reflections will show that Mr. Noakes was not in quite so much danger as he had anticipated, and if Wild could only have made sure that no second attempt would be made upon his life, he would have forgiven him—that is, he would forgive him for the present, but so soon as he was useless to him, then the grudge would be remembered.

"I will run the risk," said Wild to himself at last. "If it is my fate to be slain by him, strive as I will, I shall not be able to avert my doom. To be alone by myself for any length of time would, I am sure, be sufficient to drive me into madness. It would be much worse than a continual state of doubt and dread that I shall now be in. I will impose upon him a most fearful oath—I will awake his superstitious or religious fears, if he has any, and if I can succeed in doing that, I may be safe."

"Noakes!" he cried, raising his voice.

"Yes, Mr. Wild, I am here! Have mercy upon me!"

"If I do," added the thief-taker, "will you take the oath I shall propose, that you will never make a second attempt upon my life?"

"I will take ten thousand oaths," said the Governor, eagerly, "for such a thing is furthest from my thoughts. Be under no fear—I shall not make the attempt again. I most heartily regret having done so!"

"Well, well—that may be, and as you said some time back, it is possible for a man to determine to do something upon the impulse of the moment and then afterwards bitterly regret it."

"That's my case, Mr. Wild."

"Well, we have been companions for many a day, we have assisted each other in many a little plan, and I do not care about murdering you in cold blood. I have crimes enough to bear without having that added to the number. I will spare your life, but upon the condition that you take the oath I shall propose."

"Dictate it to me, Mr. Wild!" cried the Governor, almost frantic with eagerness—"dictate it to me; I will follow you word for word!"

"Listen, then," said Wild, who then proposed to his companion an oath of the most terrible character which it is possible to conceive.

The Governor shuddered when he uttered the last adjuration.

From what we have said, it will be seen that Jonathan Wild experienced some twinges of remorse. It is probable that they were chiefly caused by the consciousness that he had had a very narrow escape indeed from an unexpected death; and he was unnerved too, not only by the various adventures he had had since his escape from Newgate, but by the intense darkness which filled the shed, and Jonathan Wild, though bolder than the boldest in any scheme of villany, was more frightened than a child to be in the dark.

It was then that horrible and distorted countenance would seem to start out of the gloom by scores, all with their horrible glassy eyes fixed upon him—all seeming to accuse him of having cut short their lives.

But, strangely enough, if anyone was with him—if he knew that a human being was within a short distance—he was not the victim of these fantastic visions, and so he extended his forgiveness to his comrade in crime.

For some time after Mr. Noakes had taken the oath a profound silence reigned in the hut, which was broken only by the breathing of its two occupants, and an occasional movement of their limbs.

At last it began to grow lighter and lighter, and through the crevices in the shed, where the boards had been im-

perfectly or carelessly joined, there came feeble gleams of light.

Suddenly, however, the sharp report of a pistol came upon their ears.

The weapon had evidently been discharged somewhere near at hand, and both Mr. Noakes and the thief-taker started to their feet with a half-suppressed ejaculation upon their lips.

CHAPTER DXVI.

THE POLICE OFFICERS ARRIVE UPON THE BRINK OF THE OLD GRAVEL-PIT.

JONATHAN WILD and Mr. Noakes both started, for the sound had taken them completely by surprise.

There was something alarming in it too, for they jumped to the conclusion that no one would be firing in the vicinity save police officers.

They listened intently, expecting, of course, to hear something more.

But a profound silence followed.

"What does that mean?" asked Jonathan, in a faint whisper.

"I don't know, Mr. Wild—how should I? I am afraid——"

"Of what?"

"That it is our foes!"

"Hush—be silent! Let us listen!"

They did so.

But nothing further reached their ears, and the silence that reigned in the hut, profound as it had seemed to be before, now appeared to have increased.

The stillness was as remarkable as it was oppressive.

"That means something," said Wild, in a whisper; "there can be no doubt about that, and it may concern us."

"But how are we to find out whether it does or not?"

"That we must consider. I cannot remain here in suspense like this! I must know who it was that fired!"

The thief-taker walked towards the door of the shed as he spoke, and, opening it cautiously to the extent of about a couple of inches, he looked out.

Day had just dawned, and the recesses of the old gravel-pit were revealed by the faint grey light.

A kind of white mist hung over all objects, and the thief-taker, shading his eyes with his hands, strove to pierce it.

He could see nothing, however, of an unusual nature, nor could he see any symptoms of a recent disturbance having taken place.

"Very strange!" he murmured, still gazing around him.

"Can you see anything?" asked the Governor.

"No."

"I heard a shot—I am sure of that!"

"So am I. We have not been both deceived by our senses! I must, and will, find out what it means! It may be of the utmost importance."

"But how?"

"There is no one about," replied the thief-taker, "and all is silent as the very grave itself! I will creep out stealthily!"

"You may be seen."

"I think not,—the place is surely quite deserted—there is no one about save our two selves."

As he uttered these words, Wild crept stealthily out of the shed, and, stooping down behind the rank vegetation which had sprung into existence about that spot, crawled towards the little precipitous path leading to the brink of the excavation.

Up this he slowly climbed, pausing every now and then, and using every precaution he could think of to guard against being seen, in case anyone should be lurking about on the watch.

At last he reached the brink of the excavation, and, raising his head slowly, peeped over.

He could see no one.

He glared around on every side, and then, quite sure that no human being was in sight, raised his head a little higher.

Some object close at hand then attracted his attention.

After starting violently—for the discovery came upon him unexpectedly—he beckoned to his companion to ascend.

Mr. Noakes would gladly have been excused, although his curiosity was strongly raised, but just then, especially, he could not afford to run the risk of offending Wild, and so he put the best face he could on the matter, being resolved, as far as possible, to make a virtue of necessity.

Up he climbed, then, and in a few moments reached the top, for Wild made signals to him to be as speedy as he could.

"Look there!" exclaimed Jonathan as soon as he joined him.

Mr. Noakes obeyed, and saw, lying half hidden in the rank grass, something which resembled a human being.

"Who is that?"

"How should I know? But I mean to find out!"

"But we may be seen!"

"Bah!"

"It is broad daylight!"

"There is no one about. Don't be a fool, but just do as you are told! Follow me, and be d—d!"

Jonathan scrambled out of the gravel-pit, and then Mr. Noakes, looking terribly apprehensive, came after him.

Wild went direct to the spot where the object lay, and, upon a closer approach, it became quite clear that it was no other than a human being.

Not a word was spoken until they reached the body, and even then they did not speak until about a moment had elapsed, for they were both occupied in noticing its appearance.

"Here is the one who has been fired at!" were Wild's first words.

"Yes; but where is the one who fired?"

"Gone!" replied Jonathan, once more taking a long and careful look about him.

But he failed to perceive the least signs of the presence of anyone.

"We have the place all to ourselves still," he added.

"But keep a sharp look-out, Noakes! Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear, but why not return to the shed?"

"Look out, I tell you, and leave me to manage matters! Can't you see by the clothes that this is the body of a gentleman?"

"Yes."

"Then we shall find something worth while in his pockets!"

"Shall you rob him?"

"I shall take what I can find."

"He may not be dead."

"True! I did not think of that. Yet he lies still enough."

"But he may be only badly wounded."

"He is either insensible or dead. However, you keep watch, and I will make a close examination."

Jonathan stooped down over the body as he spoke.

It was that of a very young man.

His age could not certainly have been more than twenty, and his attire was of a very rich description indeed.

It must be remembered that at the time of which we write the distinction between the noble and the plebeian was much more strongly marked than now. The aristocracy had a dress of their own, and could be distinguished by it.

Wild was thus enabled to state with certainty that the young man belonged to the upper section of society.

Many valuable ornaments glittered here and there about his person, while his fingers were covered with sparkling rings.

One hand was pressed tightly upon his breast, and was covered with blood.

The ensanguined fluid welled up continually between his fingers.

His face was contracted into an expression of great agony.

Jonathan's impression was that the man was dead.

Nevertheless, he took hold of the blood-stained hand and raised it up.

The moment he did so, a kind of convulsive spasm seemed to shoot through the apparently lifeless form, and the eyes unclosed.

At first they were bright, but they suddenly became dull and glassy.

Jonathan released the hand, and in a moment afterwards it was pressed to the heart again.

The young nobleman—for such by title he evidently was—gasped for breath, and appeared to be endeavouring to speak.

He tried, too, to raise himself, but had not the power to carry his intention into effect.

Wild hesitated a moment, and then changing his position, slightly raised the head of the wounded man.

Some painful gasps was the result, and then in a hollow, broken voice, he murmured:

"I—I—am dying!—yes, surely dying! This is my death wound. I feel sure of it. The villain—to—to lure me to this place, and then to—to shoot me down like a dog! I—I—"

"Who?" asked Wild, whose curiosity was much excited by the few words he had heard. "Who shot you?"

The dying man made some desperate attempts to articulate something, but failed completely.

The syllables seemed to be hanging upon the very tip of his tongue, and yet he lacked the power to pronounce them.

"Who are you?" asked Wild. "Tell me your own name."

A series of attempts, every one more terrible than that which had preceded it, then ensued.

But Wild was fated not to know this.

With a gasping, choking kind of sob, that sounded more like a groan, the young man expired.

His head hung back, and the thief-taker was conscious at once that life had fled.

"It's all up!" he ejaculated.

"Is he dead?"

"As a nut. Is there anyone in sight?"

"Not a soul."

"Then, as we are badly off, we will see what he has got about him, and pocket it. We shall save somebody else the trouble, eh?"

"Very likely."

"Whoever finds him would certainly perform that service, and the money would be of great use to me just at the present time. We cannot tell what we may want."

While speaking these words, Jonathan Wild had not been idle.

With busy fingers, he transferred the contents of the young man's pockets to his own.

He was well paid for his trouble, for there was a large sum in money, and many valuable jewels.

"Be quick!" said Noakes, suddenly,—"*I fancy I can see some one.*"

"Where?"

"Yonder!"

Wild was on his feet in a second, gazing eagerly in the direction to which his comrade pointed.

"It's officers!" he said. "Well, we are just in time. Down with you, and crawl to the gravel-pit! We shall not be seen if we are speedy. All is well! I have the booty! On with you, and don't stop to be over-particular about getting down!"

The Governor was terrified, and made great speed.

Wild kept close behind him, anxious in the extreme to gain the cover of the shed.

Once there, he believed he should be safe.

The officers would never seek for him in such a place.

And yet as he mentally uttered the words an uneasy feeling came over his heart, for he wondered how it was they were there at all.

Could it be possible that they had trailed him?

This thought was of too dreadful a character to be entertained for a moment, and so he banished it.

The depths of the old gravel-pit were very quickly reached, and the two villains hastened to conceal themselves in the shed.

Having entered it and closed the door, they stood still, panting for breath, and listening for any sound which might reach them from above.

In the meantime, they endured a thousand terrors, for their hiding-place had never seemed so poor a one as it did at that moment.

The reason was they were menaced by danger.

Mr. Noakes had given the alarm not a second too soon.

As Jonathan Wild had truly said, they were police officers who were approaching.

They were in rather strong numbers too.

They galloped on in almost a straight line for the gravel-pit, nor did they pause until within a few yards of the brink.

Then one of them said:

"This is the place!"

Something more would then doubtless have been added, but another uttered an ejaculation, and pointed to the dead body of the young nobleman lying on the grass.

CHAPTER DXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS THE GRAVEL-PIT BY NO MEANS THE SAFE PLACE OF REFUGE HE TOOK IT TO BE.

WHAT is nowadays called "a sensation" was excited amongst the police officers when this discovery was made, and they looked at each other in a bewildered sort of way, for the sight was one they by no means expected.

They saw at once by the richness of the dress that it was a person of distinction.

"Hallo!" cried the one in command. "What is the meaning of this?"

He rode forward a few paces as he spoke.

"There's been murder here!" he exclaimed in an emphatic tone of voice. "We must investigate this before we go any further."

He slipped off his horse while speaking, and then, stooping down by the side of the dead man, commenced to make an examination in a very business-like way.

"Shot in the breast," he said. "Mortal wound of course. Who can it be, I wonder?"

He hastily searched the pockets, but found nothing of any importance.

"Robbery as well as murder," he said. "The pockets have been cleared out. The deed has been done recently, for the body is quite warm. This is one of Jonathan Wild's tricks, I'll be bound!"

"I said I thought he was here, sir!" said a police officer, who had formerly been an agent of the great thief-taker's.

"And it seems you are right, for if this is not a trace of him, it's very odd to me! One of you get down and mind the body, and we will look for the rascal!"

It was only natural that the police officers should judge by what they saw before them that Wild was guilty of the murder of the young gentleman.

The reader, however, being in full possession of the facts, knows very well that this was a little mistake, in consequence of which the thief-taker would suffer.

"Now, then, Gregory," said the chief officer, "which is the place you were mentioning?"

"Here it is, sir!" said Wild's ex-myrmidon, pointing, as he spoke, to the old gravel-pit.

"And do you think he is here?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"I have good reasons," said the man, with an air of great embarrassment.

"Then, why don't you tell them?"

"I don't like, sir."

"Why not?"

"I don't."

"But that is no answer."

"It is the best reason I can give."

"But I shall not be satisfied with it."

The man looked about him imploringly.

"We have good proof," he said, at length, "that he has been at no great distance."

"Yes, so we have."

"And, then, there is this body."

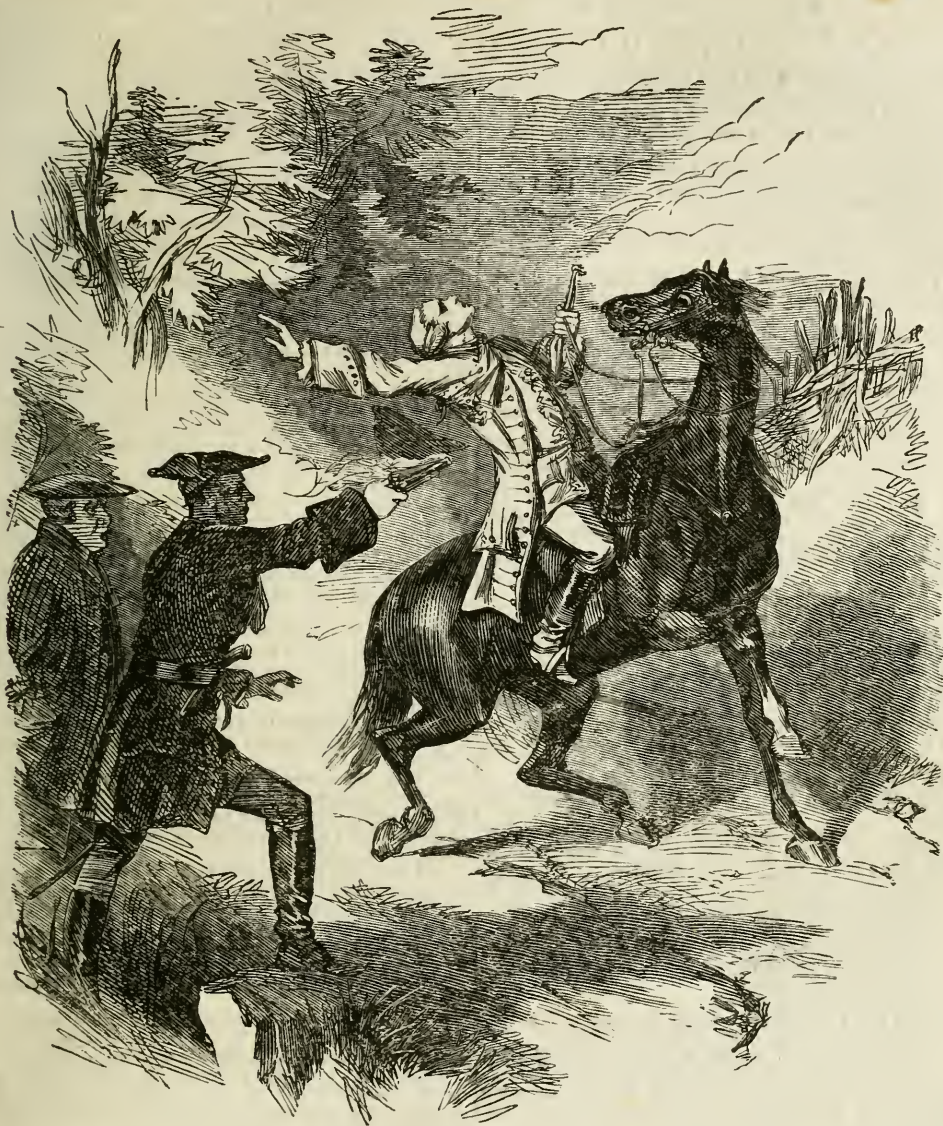
"Yes."

"That points to his presence."

"Yes."

"Then here is the gravel-pit."

"I know that."



[JONATHAN WILD OBTAINS A HORSE BY A SUMMARY PROCESS.]

"And he may be concealed in it."

"He may be; but I have not forgotten, my fine fellow, that you mentioned this place before you saw the dead body lying yonder!"

The man was silent.

"I insist upon being satisfied on this point!" said the chief officer.

"Then," replied the man, with an air of desperation, "if you will stand aside I will make a clean breast of the whole matter."

"That will be by far the best plan. Come this way."

The chief and his subordinate withdrew to a little distance, and then the latter said:

"It is some time ago now when what I am going to tell you happened, and I trust you will never use it against me."

"I will give you my word of that."

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"Then I don't mind telling you—in fact, it will ease my mind a good deal."

"Go on, then, and don't be more long-winded than you can possibly help!"

"I won't, sir; but if he is down there, he can't get away without our seeing him."

"Go on."

"Then, as I said, it's a good many years ago, and I was then in the pay of Jonathan Wild."

"I know you were, and now you have joined the regular police force."

"Just so! Well, I will tell you how I left Wild. One night he came to me, and said he had a little business on hand, and wanted my assistance."

"I asked him what it was, but he told me not to bother, and said that if I would wait I should see."

"He was rather short-tempered, so I said no more, and

he ordered me to go and fetch a light cart, that he used sometimes to carry swag away in.

"Well, I got it, and we drove off to a fine-looking house on the Oxford Road, and when he had been in a minute or two, he came out with a bundle in his arms.

"I did not ask what it was, and he threw it into the back of the cart himself, and sat up beside me again, and off we went, this time in the direction of Kensington Gravel-pits."

"Where we now are?" said the chief officer.

"Just so. Well, when we got here I stopped the cart and Wild ordered me to get down.

"I obeyed, and then, going to the back of the cart, he let down the tailboard, and said, 'Now, Gregory, help me out with the parcel.'

"I did so at once, for I wondered what it could be, and fancied if I laid hold of it I should be able to tell.

"It was wrapped up in a coarse sack, and the moment I touched it, something seemed to tell me that it was a corpse that was inside.

"I shuddered and felt very sick, but Mr. Wild called out, 'Come on!' in a very loud tone of voice, so I felt that I dared not hold back.

"Well, he took hold of one end of the sack, and I took the other, and he led the way to the brink of the gravel-pit.

"Mind how you descend, Gregory," he said. "If you fall you will break your neck—not that that would be of any particular importance, for it's sure to be broke one day or other, but you will break my neck as well!"

"I will be careful, Mr. Wild," I said.

"Mind you are—the path is very steep."

"Down we went, and every now and then my hair would stand on end, for look, there is the path, and you may guess it was rather dangerous to walk down that place carrying a load on a night that was as dark as a coal-hole."

"Never mind that—go on!"

"I am as fast as I can. However, it will be enough if I tell you we reached the bottom in safety."

"What happened next?"

"Mr. Wild went to a particular spot, and there he stopped.

"Let go!" he said, and before I was aware of it he let go his end of the sack, and down it went, with a sound that I hope I shall never hear again.

"I dropped my end pretty quick, and looking up, I saw Mr. Wild was lighting a lantern.

"I watched his motions in silence.

"The lantern was soon alight, and he cried:

"Come this way, Gregory."

"Must I bring the sack?"

"No; leave it where it is."

"With this I followed him across the bottom of the pit, my chief guide being the lantern that he carried.

"I had many narrow escapes of falling into deep holes that seemed to lie around me on every side, and which in some cases were almost full of water. You can see some of them, sir, from here, if you look down over the brink."

"Confound you—yes! Go on with your tale, and don't be so circumstantial!"

"So what, sir?"

"So roundabout. Come to the point at once!"

"I am coming to it, sir. I followed him, as I said, across the pit, until at last we came to an old ruined wooden shed. Mr. Wild pushed open the door and went in, so I followed.

"It was a shed and nothing more, and when I got inside I made so bold as to say:

"What kind of place is this, Mr. Wild?—what was it used for?"

"A tool-house, of course," he said. "What else could it be used for? Look there, in yonder corner, and you will see a spade and a pickaxe."

"I looked, and sure enough there were the articles he had mentioned.

"Pick them up," he continued, "and follow me."

"I picked them up, and we went out of the shed, and Mr. Wild he stopped just where we had put the sack.

"Gregory," he said, "there's something in that sack which must never see the light of day any more; so you

must dig a deep hole. You begin, and when you are tired I will help you."

"It was more than my life was worth to disobey any of Mr. Wild's commands; so I began to make a hole, and worked till my back ached, and then he took his turn, and so we went on, until at last the pit was so deep that it was as much as we could do to scramble out of it.

"Mr. Wild had a large flask of brandy in his pocket, from which he drank every now and then and handed it to me—and very strong brandy it was too, for it took quite an effect, and I felt quite ready to do anything he wanted.

"Now, Gregory," he said, when we had scrambled out of the hole, "we shall soon have this job over, and you will be well paid for it, mind that—providing, of course, that you hold your tongue and never say a word about it to a living soul."

"I won't," I replied, "nor to the dead ones either."

"Mr. Wild laughed, and then he took hold of one end of the sack, and I took hold of the other, and Mr. Wild he says:

"One, two, three!" and when he said 'three' we let go, and down it fell into the pit."

"What was it?" asked the officer, who could not help feeling deeply interested in the man's singular narrative.

"It was a dead body, sir—a corpus."

"How do you know that? Did you see it?"

"No, I did not see it; but when I had hold of my end of the sack I felt the feet plainly; but whether it was a man or whether it was a woman I can't tell, for as soon as he let go, Mr. Wild he said:

"Shovel the earth in, Gregory, and make haste! When we have done that we shall be able to leave this place!"

"Well, sir, I shovelled the earth in, and at last we made an end of the job, and Mr. Wild he made me take the tools back into the shed and put them in one corner.

"Good hiding-place this would make, sir," I remarked, "in case anybody was wanted—nice and snug, and out of the way."

"Very," said Wild; "but it's very few people that know it, and those that do would not think of venturing down."

"Why not?"

"Why, there was a foul murder committed here not many years ago, and the people imagine the ghosts go stalking about, and so they are frightened to come near the place; but I take no notice of such folly; it is not worth notice, is it?"

"I don't know, sir," said I; "my conviction is, that spirits are best let alone—leastways, those kind of spirits;" so Mr. Wild he laughed, and we had another swig at the brandy, and afterwards left the place."

"And is that all?" asked the officer.

"Every word, sir, as well as I can remember it."

"And you remained with Wild until the break-up of his establishment?"

"Yes, sir, I did, and then became a police officer in earnest, and I hope that during the time I have been under your command I have given you satisfaction."

"Yes, pretty well; but I can promise you if it was not for that dead body yonder, and my own convictions concerning it, I should not place much importance upon what you have told me."

"Shouldn't you, sir? Well, that's all as people may think. Now, I thought to myself this way:—Mr. Wild being somewhere about these parts, and being run after pretty close, would bethink himself of the gravel-pit being a good hiding-place, and would creep down into it, and I should not wonder if we find him there at the present moment."

There was a great deal of plausibility and probability about what Gregory said, and the officer, after a moment's reflection, exclaimed:

"Well, we have quite lost the scent, and he's nowhere in sight, and we might be much worse employed than in searching the recesses of this old place—I will do it at once."

The officer summoned his men around him, and disposed of them to the best advantage, some of them remaining to keep watch at the top, and the others following him down into the recesses of the gravel-pit, the man Gregory leading the way.

The precipitous nature of the path made the descent a tedious affair, but at last the bottom was reached without accident.

The man Gregory then raised his arm, and pointing before him, said :

"Look! there is the shed I told you about,—he may be hiding in it."

The police officers all fixed their eyes upon the wooden shed with the greatest possible amount of interest, and having done so, proceeded to get their firearms a readiness, for they knew that if the thief-taker was within, the encounter would be a sharp and severe one.

"Come on, my lads!" said the chief officer; "let there be no flinching,—if he's inside we'll have him! Remember, our orders are, 'dead or alive,' and it's my belief it will be the best plan for us to take him dead, and the reward will be all the same."

The officer walked boldly in the direction of the door of the shed, and his men followed closely behind him.

For aught he knew, he might be walking to certain death, for if Wild was within it would be the easiest matter in the world for him to fire upon the officer when he drew near.

But a most suspicious silence reigned about the bottom of the gravel-pit.

At last the door was reached, and the officer, dashing it open, rushed inside, pistol in hand.

But a cry of disappointment came from his lips.

He saw at a glance that the shed was empty, and that there was not the slightest trace of the presence of human beings in it.

Gregory, too, looked very foolish, for in his own mind he felt confident that Jonathan Wild would be found in the shed.

It was empty, however, there could be no doubt about that, nor did it require even a moment's search to show that there was no hiding-place in it whatever, nor was there any mode of exit, save the one by which they had entered.

CHAPTER DXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD IS VERY HARD PRESSED BY HIS PURSUERS.

THE disappearance of Jonathan Wild and his companion in guilt seems not a little mysterious, but, like many other mysteries, the explanation was simple enough.

When Mr. Noakes had given the alarm about the approach of the police, and when the thief-taker had satisfied himself by a scrutinising glance that his foes were approaching, they both upon the first impulse descended the gravel-pit and shut themselves up in the shed.

Jonathan Wild had not been in the darkness and silence of this place more than two minutes before he came to the conclusion that he had acted very unwisely indeed.

He said not a word to his companion, however, but opened the door and listened.

The silence about the place was most profound, and directly after he commenced listening, the thief-taker heard plainly enough the sound produced by the approach of his foes.

He also heard them halt up above, and he heard the shout which they gave upon making the discovery of the dead body.

When he had heard this, his mind was made up.

"Noakes," he said, "this won't do—we must get out of this!"

"How?" asked the Governor. "Where can we go?"

"That I will tell you in a moment. Hush!"

The murmuring of voices came to their ears.

"We must not stop here, Noakes,—they will find us if we do!"

"They will not come down into this place."

"They will, I tell you!"

"But how can they know we are here?"

"They will guess it."

"But we can't leave without being seen."

"I don't know that. We had better make the attempt, anyhow. Do you remember the dead body up above? When they see that, they'll very likely set it down to my account, and, as you know very well, I have had a share in the matter. It's clear enough to me that the officers are above. They have found the body, and the next thing they do will be to look down the gravel-pit for me, because this is the only hiding-place there is."

Mr. Noakes groaned, as he ejaculated :

"Then we are lost!"

"Not a bit of it!" said Wild. "It strikes me in a most forcible manner we shall be found."

The Governor did not much relish the joke, but Wild continued :

"Just be in readiness to follow me. When I dart out, you follow me, and keep my back just in front. Never mind where I go. Keep straight on—if you don't, your neck will most likely suffer."

Mr. Noakes remained silent, and Jonathan fixed his bloodshot, tiger-like eyes upon the brink of the pit.

He soon satisfied himself that not one of his enemies was looking down, and, believing that he should never have a better opportunity than the present, he cried :

"Now!"

He made a bound across the bottom of the gravel-pit as he spoke, and Mr. Noakes, being under the dominion of fear, followed closely at his heels.

As soon as ever they gained the side of the excavation, they were quite secure from the observation of those above, because the ferns and other vegetation that grew rankly all around made it impossible for anyone to see direct down from the top.

Jonathan did not speak a word, but kept pushing steadily onward, until presently he paused before an indentation.

It looked like the entrance into some rude kind of passage, and was, indeed, a kind of tunnel which had been made by the workmen when following out a particular vein of gravel of finer quality than the rest.

How far this working might penetrate, the thief-taker had no means of ascertaining, but just then he heard the officers about to commence their descent, and, feeling that he could not possibly make his position worse than it was, he entered, and strode boldly onward, although the darkness was intense.

The passage wound in and out in a tortuous fashion, for in making it, the men had followed the course which the vein of fine gravel took.

As he kept going on and on still further, without meeting with any signs of a termination, Jonathan Wild's hopes began to rise, and he felt as though he was about to elude his pursuers once more.

As for Mr. Noakes, he was conscious that he was going somewhere, and that was about all, except that he was painfully aware that the police officers were not very far behind him.

Jonathan walked boldly onward at a very rapid speed, and by the adoption of a very simple precaution, he was enabled to save himself from coming in contact with rough walls.

He extended both his arms as he walked on, and by so doing was enabled to touch both sides of the passage.

Of course, had there been anything in the centre, he would have run against it with considerable force.

Although, as we have said, his hopes began to rise, there was but little to encourage him, for although he had come thus far, he might reach the termination of the passage in a moment, and the officers would not have much trouble in following him.

He would then be able to take his choice either to die at once or surrender himself a prisoner.

In the meanwhile, the officers, finding that Wild was not in the shed, were preparing themselves to take their departure, when the man Gregory, who clung to the idea he had conceived with praiseworthy tenacity, discovered, while looking about, the imprint of a foot upon a portion of the ground where the soil was softer than it was elsewhere.

He gave a loud cry, and called the attention of the others to it, and upon searching narrowly upon the ground, they quickly discovered many other footmarks, which, however, would have escaped any but the most rigid search, and they did not find one so distinct as that which had first attracted Gregory's attention.

These footmarks showed clearly enough that the gravel-pit had been recently visited, and the officers began to think that, after all, Wild was concealed somewhere about it.

By looking closely, and comparing the nature and size of the footprints, they at length arrived at the conclusion that the footmarks were those of two persons, and eventually they traced them to the little passage which the thief-taker had entered.

They now imagined that they had run the fox to earth,

but when the officer looked down the passage, and saw how very narrow it was, the thought occurred to him how easy it would be for Wild to stand at a little distance and fire at them as they entered.

Every shot in such a case would be effective, for it would be like firing down a tube.

Before proceeding further, he resolved to try an experiment.

Raising his voice to its highest pitch, he cried:

"Jonathan Wild, we have tracked you to this spot! Come forth at once, and surrender yourself a prisoner, or we fire! I will give you one minute to reflect, and if you don't appear at the end of that time, I shall order my men to fire a volley, and in such a confined space as this you cannot escape!"

Having thus delivered himself, the officer turned round, and ordered his men to have their pistols ready, so as to fire at the very moment he gave the word.

The time mentioned expired, but all remained as silent as before.

Not the slightest notice was taken of his highly-specific speech, and, probably enraged by the contempt by which he imagined he was treated, the officer cried to his men:

"Fire!"

They obeyed, and a terrific report was the result.

The bullets went crashing into the gravel, and the concussion of the air caused by the discharge of so many firearms loosened the earth which formed the sides and roof of the passage, and for several minutes there was a continuous fall of small stones.

The trifling sound this produced died away, but there were no signs of Jonathan Wild.

"He's in here—I'm convinced of that!" said the officer. "Perhaps ere we go many yards we shall stumble over his body. Follow me! This passage is clear for some distance—that's quite certain!"

"Had not we better have a light, sir?" said Gregory. "In the turnings and windings of this place he may escape."

"A light would be better; but how are we to get one?"

"There's plenty of wood about that would burn well and form capital torches."

"Light some, then. Be quick! I am anxious to explore this place!"

As Gregory had said, there was plenty of wood lying about that would answer the purpose, and in a very short space of time indeed the greater part of the officers had provided themselves with these rude torches.

They burned but dimly at first, though their brilliancy soon increased.

The officer in command of the police was a bold man, for, instead of keeping in the rear, as most commanders do, he led the way.

This inspired his men with courage, and they pressed eagerly after him.

Every now and then, as they pushed on along the passage, they would pause to listen, but on no occasion did the faintest sound come to their ears.

But as they met with no obstruction or opposition, they continued to press onward, and under the excitement of the moment were scarcely aware of the distance to which they had penetrated.

Suddenly, however, they perceived in the distance something which looked like a tiny twinkling star, but as soon as he perceived it, the officer knew what it meant, and so he cried aloud:

"Look—look—yonder is the end of the passage! There's the opening from it! The villain has escaped! Let us make all speed, and we may yet be able to overtake him!"

Fixing his gaze upon the speck of light before him, the chief officer ran at full speed along the passage, and at every step he took, the opening appeared to grow larger and larger.

At last he emerged into the open air.

He looked about him, but was unable to see the least signs of those of whom he was in search.

He found himself in another gravel-pit, of a character similar to the one he had left, only it was not so deep, nor was it so great in area.

Very rationally the chief officer came to the conclusion that the fugitives would embrace the opportunity of leaving

the underground passage, and so, without stopping to search whether there were any other passages branching off from this second gravel-pit, he ran at a reckless speed up the narrow winding path that led to the upper earth.

Upon gaining the top, he dashed the perspiration from his forehead and looked around him in every direction; but there was no sign of Mr. Wild and Mr. Noakes to be seen.

What to do now he scarcely knew, and he stopped to reflect.

While his thoughts were thus occupied, we will take the opportunity of returning to Mr. Wild.

He, too, saw the faint speck of light in advance, and, knowing what it meant, felt a fresh accession of vigour.

Onward he went at a speed that Mr. Noakes could scarcely keep up with, although he was urged forward by terror.

Upon reaching the second gravel-pit, Mr. Wild espied the path leading to the top, and ran up it with the agility of a squirrel.

He panted for breath when he reached the brink of the gravel-pit, for his exertions had been very great indeed.

Being familiar with the locality, he knew in a moment where he was, and that he had nothing to fear from any of the police officers who might be on the watch at the brink of the other gravel-pit, for a small clump of trees intervened between them.

"Now, Noakes," he cried, "give me your hand; we must make a run for it this time! That's our only chance. Everything depends upon our getting shelter somewhere before our pursuers can see us! It's worth an effort. Rouse yourself—summon up all your energies, without you wish to become a prisoner!"

Mr. Noakes was influenced in a great measure by Jonathan Wild's example, and put forth his very best speed.

Unfortunately for the fugitives, the general character of the ground was flat, so that they would have to run a long way before they could get out of sight.

Wild did not look back many times, yet, whenever he did so, he made certain he should catch sight of his foes.

But they did not appear, for, as the reader will understand, the police officers had lost a great deal of valuable time after descending into the gravel-pit.

All this time the thief-taker had been in motion, so he gained a considerable advantage.

It was yet very early in the morning, and there scarcely appeared any signs of human beings having left their homes.

This made Jonathan still more inclined to think he should be able to hide himself somewhere before his pursuers could see him.

He looked all round in search of some place or other, but for many miles the only object he could perceive was a windmill, the sails of which were flying round somewhat rapidly as they were urged by the fresh morning breeze.

This did not promise to afford a very good chance for concealment, since they could scarcely hope to gain the interior without being seen by some one who was occupied about it.

But this was his only hope, and, rendered desperate by this knowledge, the thief-taker made his way in a straight line for it.

He looked back, but the officers were not in sight, and he already believed that he had got to such a distance that even if they traced him to the second gravel-pit, and reached the top of it, they would be unable to perceive him.

Being under this belief, he slackened speed a little as soon as he got near the windmill.

With straining eyes he looked at every part of it, and at the ground surrounding it, but he saw no one.

This inspired him with fresh confidence, and he accelerated his pace a little, though his limbs almost refused obedience to his will, he was so fearfully exhausted by the tremendous exertions he had made.

CHAPTER DXIX.

JONATHAN WILD HIDES FROM HIS PURSUERS IN A WINDMILL.

"Now, Noakes," said Wild, "we have only to make one more push! We must hide!"

"Where?"

"There!"

"In that windmill?"

"Yes."

"But we shall be seen."

"There is no one about."

"Perhaps people are within."

"We must chance that. Come on! Quick! There—that will do!"

While this conversation was in progress, Jonathan half dragged his trembling comrade towards the windmill.

He paused near the foot of a flight of wooden steps that led up to a door that was standing partly open.

The grinding of the machinery could be heard plainly enough, but that was the only sound that reached their ears.

Wild listened in vain for the murmuring of voices.

"I don't believe there is anyone inside, Noakes," he said. "However, we must run the risk. It is the only chance we have."

The Governor looked up at the door of the mill with a terror-stricken countenance.

"We shall be seen if we linger here," said Jonathan, in an energetic whisper. "Besides, the police are not very far off—you may depend upon that."

"Can you see them?"

"No; they are not in sight yet, but we can't tell how soon they may be. Up with you! Ascend the steps! I will follow!"

After all that had happened, Mr. Noakes was less than ever in a position to disobey the commands of the thief-taker; and so, with a half-suppressed groan, he ran up the wooden steps.

Jonathan kept close behind him, and it might be said that both passed through the door at the same moment.

The interior seemed very dark in comparison with the light outside, but Jonathan noticed that there were some sacks of grain or flour in one corner.

There was no one in this part of the mill, though there might be in some other portion of it.

Wild was aware that if he was speedy he should be able to conceal himself here, and he led Mr. Noakes towards the sacks.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Wild?"

"Hide behind those sacks. Now then, be quick! I will follow. I fancy I can hear somebody coming now."

This was enough to frighten Mr. Noakes into motion, and he scrambled off over the sacks, and not without some difficulty squeezed himself down behind them.

The thief-taker did likewise, and though their hiding-place was of a very artificial character, yet if their presence was unsuspected, as they believed it was, they would be tolerably safe.

After they had been behind the sacks a few minutes, they became more comfortable, for the grain yielded, and allowed them a little more space than they had at first been able to obtain.

In the greatest dread and alarm they remained here, expecting every moment to receive some indication of the approach of their pursuers.

But as time passed on, leaving them undisturbed, their courage began to rise.

Jonathan began to congratulate himself upon having made another escape, and settled himself more comfortably than ever.

"We will remain here till night," he said, in a whisper, to his companion. "Rely upon it, we shall never be found."

"I hope not."

"Hush! Don't say another word!"

"Why?"

"I fancy I hear some one."

Mr. Noakes was silent instantly, and straining eagerly to catch the slightest sound.

Wild had not suffered his fancy to deceive him.

There was the tread of a foot-step without, and then the steps began to creak, as they always did when anyone ascended them.

Somebody was going to enter the mill.

Wild came to the conclusion that it was a person connected with the premises, for he knew his enemies would not approach singly.

It would have been a satisfaction if he could have peeped at the door of the mill.

But that was not to be thought of.

If he raised his head ever so little above the level of the sacks, he would be in great danger of being seen.

So he crouched down instead, which was by far the wiser proceeding of the two.

The footstep was a heavy one.

It paused just inside the door, and Wild could imagine just how the new comer was gazing about him.

He held his breath almost.

It was only for a moment that the man paused.

He continued on towards the interior of the building.

It was a source of deep joy to the two fugitives when he took his departure.

About a quarter of an hour elapsed, during which all remained perfectly silent, and then the fugitives heard a rumbling sound, which was produced by the approach of some heavy vehicle, such as a waggon.

Nearer and nearer it came, until at length it stopped just outside.

The rumbling of the wheels and the jingling of the bells on the horses' heads ceased, and then some one called out, in a loud, drawing voice:

"Hullo, Mr. Miller! Be ye within? Hallo, there!"

"What is it?" asked another voice from the interior of the mill.

"I ha' brought the wheat from Farmer Giles's!"

"All right! I will be with you directly!"

Jonathan began to grow uneasy, and, as will be seen, his uneasiness rapidly grew greater.

The man who had entered the mill came to the door, and the waggoner ascended the steps.

"Where would you like the sacks put, Mr. Miller?" asked the latter.

"Well, I don't know!" was the reply. "You see, these sacks here will have to be ground first, and so they will all have to be shifted!"

"Will they, though?"

"I am afraid so."

"Is there nowhere else it can be put?"

"No."

"It will be a devil of a job to move all that lot, master!"

"It will; but it can't be helped."

Can the reader imagine Jonathan's feelings while he listened to this brief conversation?

Can he judge the state of Mr. Noakes's mind?

Both broke out into a cold perspiration, and after the last words spoken by the miller, they quite gave themselves up for lost.

The removal of the sacks would of course ensure their discovery, and then what could they say for themselves? Under the best circumstances, suspicion would be excited.

But the miller might insist upon detaining them, or he might recognise them, or have been put upon his guard by the police officers.

In either of these cases, the consequence would be serious.

Or the position might be complicated by the arrival of the officers while the dispute was going on.

All these things passed through Jonathan's mind, and made his heart turn cold within his bosom.

The waggoner was very unwilling to assist in the removal of the sacks, or to wait while they were moved.

A good deal of time was wasted in talking the matter over without any definite conclusion being arrived at.

At last they ended where they began, for the miller consented to allow the sacks to be placed upon the others.

Jonathan and his companion were now somewhat relieved, though they were by no means out of danger.

The unloading of the waggon now commenced, and as the sacks were brought into the mill, they were placed on the top of the others.

It was rather dark inside, and this was lucky for the two fugitives.

If it had not been so, their discovery would have been certain.

As it was, some sacks were placed over the space where they had concealed themselves.

In a few moments, they were so piled up that all fear of discovery was at an end.

But another danger manifested itself.

The pressure of the mass above was almost more than they could sustain, and, moreover, they were deprived of the amount of air that was requisite for free respiration.

They were within an ace of suffocation, until they managed to move a little.

The waggon contained a great number of sacks, and, as they were placed higher and higher, the sound of voices grew less audible, until at length it was only with the greatest difficulty that Wild could distinguish what was said.

Suddenly he heard the trampling of horses' feet, and immediately afterwards a loud voice cried:

"Hallo, there! Is there anyone within?"

Both the fugitives were made aware by this that a troop of police officers had arrived.

Their fears again assumed the mastery over them, but after a little reflection Wild grew calmer as he remembered that the miller would most probably say he had seen no one.

But even if so, the officers might not be satisfied with the reply.

How was it that they had ridden up to the mill?

Was it by chance, or as a part of a general search they were making, or had they received some precise information?

These were questions that Wild tormented himself with in vain.

He was unable to reply to them, for there was nothing that would serve him as a guide.

Hearing the noise caused by their horses, and also hearing the loud shout, the miller and waggoner both hastened to the door of the mill.

To their astonishment they beheld a tolerably numerous body of police officers, who all looked as though they had been engaged in rather hard service.

Their clothes were covered with the light-brown dirt which had clung to them while making their explorations in the gravel-pits, while their horses were in a perfect foam.

"What's the matter?" asked the miller, not without some trepidation, for the sight of so many well-armed and mounted police officers was calculated to excite alarm.

"Have you seen any strangers about this place?" asked the officer in command of the troop.

"When?"

"This morning."

"No, I haven't."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite! Might I make so bold, sir, as to inquire who you are after?"

"Yes, and then you will be on your guard. We are after Jonathan Wild and another man he has with him."

"Jonathan Wild?" repeated the miller.

"Yes."

"Why, I thought he was a thief-catcher?"

"So he pretended to be, but he has been found out. I have a warrant against him, to take him dead or alive."

"Is he about this part?"

"Yes, we have traced him to within about a mile of this place."

"Oh lor! I feel frightened to death!"

"Pho—pho! Don't be alarmed. Have you such a thing as a gun about your premises?"

"I have an old musket here, loaded with small shot, that I keep to drive the sparrows off with, drat 'em!"

"Then when you see Jonathan Wild, all you have got to do is to put your musket to your shoulder and fire just as you would shoot a sparrow."

"But shouldn't I get into trouble?"

"Devil a bit!"

"How's that?"

"How's that!"

"Yes, isn't killing murder?"

"Not in this case. Don't I tell you there is a warrant out against Jonathan Wild and the man with him, em-

powering anyone to take them dead or alive, it doesn't matter which?"

"Oh, that's it!"

"You understand now?"

"Oh yes!"

"That's right, then; and now I will give you a description of them, and if you should see them you will know what to do."

The officer then gave a very good description of the two fugitives, and concluded by saying:

"It is impossible to say just where they are hid. I am sure they are close at hand, so keep a sharp lookout."

"Never fear, sir! If I see him, I'll pepper the vagabone!"

"Do!"

"I will, depend upon it."

"You are certain you have not seen him?"

"Oh yes!"

"How long have you been unloading this waggon?"

"A goodish bit."

"How long?"

"I can't say the precise time, because I don't know, but you see we are almost done."

"They haven't hidden themselves in the mill, have they?"

"Oh no!"

"Have you been in it all the morning?"

"Very nearly."

"But not quite?"

"No, not quite."

"Then," said the officer, with an air of sudden determination, "as this is the only building for miles, and the only place where they could possibly find shelter, I will just make so bold as to look over your premises. Now, my lads," he added, "get ready, and if you catch sight of him, fire!"

The police officers alighted from their steeds, and, pistol in hand, followed their commander up the steps that led to the interior of the mill.

CHAPTER DXX.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES FIND THEIR SITUATION IN THE OLD MILL GROW MORE AND MORE UNPLEASANT.

NOT a single word of this terrible conversation had escaped Jonathan Wild's ears, and when he heard the trampling sound produced by his foes ascending the stairs, he endeavoured to resign himself to death.

Mr. Noakes was so overcome with fright that he fainted, so that he remained unconscious of his danger.

Perhaps, so far as their own safety was concerned, it was better so, because the Governor did not possess the same firmness of nerve as his companion, and in his terror he might give vent to some exclamation that would have the effect of making their enemies acquainted with their hiding-place.

The thief-taker, however, could be depended upon.

We ought to state that the reason he heard all that was said with so much distinctness was owing to his pressing his ear against the wooden walls of the windmill.

Everything now depended upon the rigour with which the officers conducted their search.

Of course, if they pried into every corner, as they ought to do, the fugitives would be discovered.

They might, however, shrink from the task of removing so many sacks of grain, which would require a very large expenditure of labour, and this was Wild's only chance.

He comforted himself with the reflection that it was not as though the officers had seen him enter the mill, or even as if they had tracked him to it. In either of these two cases they would not have rested until they had made a thorough search.

Having nothing but a suspicion that he might be there, might perhaps make them less careful.

However, that remains to be seen.

The officer in command showed, by the precautions that he took, that he quite understood the best way to proceed in matters like the present.

"Two of you remain here," he said, addressing his followers. "Don't stir from the spot, and if you see or hear anything unusual, raise an immediate alarm."

"All right, sir!"

"And now, Mr. Miller," added the officer, "perhaps you will be good enough to show us the way to the top of the mill."

"The very top?"

"Yes—we will begin our search there, and then come gradually downwards, until we reach the very bottom. Lead the way, for I don't want to waste time!"

"Very good, sir—I'll show you the way with great pleasure."

"Perhaps you would not mind letting me go with you," said the waggoner. "If so be the vagabones are here, I should like to see them caught, and perhaps I might lend a helping hand."

"By all means!" said the officer. "Come on, and if we capture the rascals, of course you will come in for your share of the reward!"

"And me?" asked the miller.

"Yes."

"Come on, then! Don't stop talking any longer—come along!"

It was wonderful what a difference it made to the miller when he learned that he stood a chance of taking a share of the reward.

He led the way to the top of the mill, and then the officer commenced his search in the manner he had announced his intention of doing.

But, as we know just where Wild is, we cannot feel much interest in the details of their search—therefore we pass over them.

They were absent an intolerably long time, Wild thought, who began to fear that his companion would recover his senses, and so give the alarm.

The two officers who had been left on guard seated themselves on the sacks, and made themselves as comfortable as they could under the circumstances.

At last the others returned.

They looked hot and tired, and disappointment was written legibly on all their countenances.

"When you have searched this place you have searched all the mill!" exclaimed the miller.

The chief officer looked around him.

"How long have those sacks been there?" he asked.

"Some of them a fortnight, and the others we have put there this morning."

"Humph!"

"Should you like to look if he is hidden behind them?"

"I don't know."

"He might be."

Jonathan felt at that moment what exquisite pleasure it would give him could he but have strangled the miller for making such a proposition.

The officer looked at the sacks in silence.

No doubt he was calculating how long it would take to move them, and deliberating as to what probability there was of Jonathan being hidden there.

"I wish you had come a little sooner," continued the miller.

"Why?"

"Because before the waggon was unloaded there wasn't half so many sacks, and I wanted them moved, because, as the wheat had been in the mill some time, I wanted to grind it before that which has just arrived."

"I don't think he is here," said the officer. "I have not been able to find even a trace of him. Good-bye, Mr. Miller—we will look elsewhere."

And, indeed, there seemed nothing left for the officers to do but to take their departure.

Jonathan began to breathe more freely when he heard these words spoken, and directly afterwards the officers began to descend the steps.

He pressed his ear as close to the woodwork as ever he could, and listened with more eagerness than he had ever listened before.

He heard his foes mount their horses—he heard the word of command given—and then, finally, the clatter of their horses' hoofs as they rode away.

The danger he now believed was past, but he soon found himself mistaken.

The waggoner and the miller watched the officers until they were out of sight, and then resumed their task of unloading the waggon.

While doing so, they whiled away the time as well as they could by conversing with each other.

"Who'd ha' thought, now," said the miller, "that that villain, Jonathan Wild, should be about these parts?"

"It's very strange, ain't it?"

"It is—to be police officer one day, and hunted like a thief the next! But I know what I shall do if I catch sight of him again!"

"What?"

"Why, I shall up with my gun and shoot him as I would a rook! Didn't the officer say he would stand by me for doing it, and the reward was all the same whether he was alive or dead?"

"He did?"

"Yes; and I want money badly, I do, for trade isn't what it used to was. I shall watch to-night, in case he might take it into his head to come about here, and if he does, pop—down he goes! I shouldn't stand on no ceremony!"

"Well, Mr. Miller, it's no concern of mine, but being as we have finished our job, I vote we take a drop of ale together, and after that I'm off!"

"Come along, then! I have got a drop of home-brewed in my cottage!"

The pair then, to Wild's extreme satisfaction, left the mill.

As soon as he was quite sure that they had gone, he turned his attention to his companion, who, he found, was just recovering his senses.

He determined he should hear good news at once.

"It's all right, Noakes!" he said, in as loud a tone of voice as he dared to use. "I tell you it's all right! We have done them again! The officers have been and gone, and now we are safe!"

Mr. Noakes did not at first understand what was said to him, but by degrees he comprehended it.

"Is it really true?" he said.

"Yes, quite true. You need be in no doubt about it. We are ten times safer than ever now!"

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, they have searched this place, and not having found us, have come to the conclusion that we are not in it, and so they won't trouble themselves any further about it."

"But the miller?"

"Oh, never mind him! Leave me to deal with him!"

"This life will kill me!"

"Not a bit of it!"

"I tell you it will!"

"Don't be a fool, Noakes, but listen to me!"

"What have you got to say?"

"I'm worn out. I want sleep. We shall have to stop here some hours, for it will not be safe to leave till nightfall. In the meantime, I should like to take the opportunity of having some rest, for I may go a long while without having another chance."

Jonathan Wild did not think it necessary to say any more, but composed himself to sleep as well as the nature of his hiding-place would allow him.

In a little while he was soundly slumbering.

Mr. Noakes sat still in an agony of fright, dreading every moment that they would be discovered.

The miller came back, and almost terrified the Governor into a swoon again by taking down his gun and withdrawing the charge.

He substituted another that was likely to do a great deal more damage than its predecessor.

He then resumed his daily labours.

Very slowly indeed did the hours pass away—that is, to Mr. Noakes, for Wild was unconscious of the flight of time.

The thief-taker did not awake until just after sunset.

The mill was rather rudely built, inasmuch as no pains had been taken to make the timbers join closely enough together to exclude the draught.

There were numberless chinks in every direction, and it was by noting the colour of the light that came through these that the thief-taker was able to form some idea of the flight of time.

At last it grew quite dark.

The miller left the mill, and then, for the first time, Wild discovered that he had to grapple with a difficulty of rather a stupendous character.

He had found a secure hiding-place—had with great trouble squeezed himself into it.

Since then, however, some scores of heavy sacks of grain had been piled up on the others, and they formed a miniature mountain above his head.

How, then, was he to get out?

This was a problem indeed, and he taxed his brain vainly in order to find a solution to it.

They were literally prisoners.

Mr. Noakes quite overlooked this circumstance, and he asked:

"When shall you try to leave, Mr. Wild?"

"I should like to go whenever I could," was the reply.

"But how are we to move the sacks on the top of us?"

As soon as he found they were prisoners, Mr. Noakes was in a dreadful state of mind.

Jonathan was silent for nearly half an hour.

Then he spoke.

"We have one chance, Noakes, and only one!"

"Have we one?"

"Yes; but it is as good as none!"

Mr. Noakes, whose hopes had risen considerably, was much depressed.

"What is it?" he at last ventured to ask.

"It is to push out one of these planks that form the side of the mill."

"And why can't you do it?"

"I daresay I could do it, for the place seems old and rotten, but I should make a noise. I couldn't do it without."

"Ah!" said Mr. Noakes, in a dejected tone.

"And then, that confounded miller is on the watch, and would hear us!"

"And he has got a gun! I heard him load it!"

"D—n his gun!"

"So say I! How can we get out, Mr. Wild? You are a cleverer man than I am, and I leave it for you to say how the thing is to be done. We can't stay here all the while—can we?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, then, what's to be done?"

"We must wait till the night gets more advanced. It would never do for us to be discovered now."

They did wait, until Wild's patience was quite exhausted.

When this took place he painfully turned himself round and began feeling the different planks, in order to find out which one would be likely to give way with the least trouble.

He presently found one that was very loose indeed, and which apparently would require but little strength to remove.

Jonathan took a clasp-knife from his pocket, and, by the aid of this solitary tool, commenced his attack upon the plank.

He had to pause every now and then to listen, in order to ascertain that all was well.

At length, being satisfied upon this point, he began to work with greater vigour and determination.

By dint of using his knife, sometimes as a lever to force out the rusty nails, and sometimes to cut away the wood, he finally succeeded in displacing the plank altogether.

He could not avoid making a little noise, and the crash with which the plank fell to the ground sounded in his ears as something terrific.

"Now, Noakes," cried Jonathan, "quick! It won't do to linger! Follow me—this is the way!"

While he spoke these words, the thief-taker slipped with great celerity through the opening which he had made.

Mr. Noakes followed with all possible speed, for he by no means desired to be left in the mill by himself.

Scarcely, however, had his feet touched the ground than there was a bright flash and a loud report, and a loud voice, which they at once recognised as the miller's, roared out:

"Pepper for one, I hope!"

CHAPTER DXXI.

JONATHAN WILD RESOLVES TO HAVE A HORSE, AND ADOPTS SUMMARY MEANS FOR OBTAINING ONE.

WILD heard the report of the gun, and so knew he was all right, and his presence of mind never deserted him.

Mr. Noakes heard it too, but upon him an opposite effect was produced.

The miller had kept well upon the watch.

The slight sound which Wild had made in displacing the board had not escaped his observation, and at first when he heard it he was very undecided as to what he should do.

After a little reflection, however, he resolved to say nothing to anyone, and to seat himself upon the ground in front of the mill, taking up such a position as would enable him to command the spot where Wild was at work.

To use his own expression, "he covered that plank!"

Wild did not get on with his work very rapidly, as we already know, and the miller began to grow weary of having his attention kept on the stretch for so long.

The fall of the plank was a thing he had not expected, and the crash with which it came to the ground quite alarmed him.

For a second he was unable to pull the trigger, but his presence of mind returning to him, he fired.

But he was just a second too late.

Wild sprang up and gave one bound on to the miller like an enraged tiger.

That individual was by no means prepared for the attack, and was indeed in a great deal of frustration altogether.

He had a very wholesome dread of the thief-taker, who, somehow or other, had managed to obtain the reputation of being more than a match for any other man.

This proved a fortunate thing for Wild, and more than once he owed his life to it, and to nothing else.

Wild's eyes fastened like a hawk's upon the gun.

He seized it in an instant, and whirled it round his head with lightning-like rapidity.

Down it came upon the crown of the unlucky miller.

A most ominous crash was the result, and the next instant he was lying on the ground as though utterly bereft of life.

Wild waved the musket round his head, and seemed about to deal another blow.

But if such was his intention, he changed it.

Had he struck a thousand blows, the man would not have felt one of them.

Uttering an exclamation, Wild turned round, and was surprised at being unable to see anything of his companion.

"Hallo, Noakes!" he cried. "Where are you, you d—d coward? Where are you, I say?"

This question met with no response, and, looking in the direction of the mill, Jonathan fancied he could perceive some dark, huddled-up mass lying near it.

Concluding that this must be the body of his companion, he took his way towards it with long strides.

Upon coming closer, he found that his conjecture was a correct one.

"Noakes!" he said—"Noakes! Get up, will you?—get up, and be d—d!"

There was no reply.

"I wonder if he is dead?" was the thief-taker's next exclamation—"I wonder if he is dead? Perhaps he has received the contents of that gun, and yet I don't think so; the shots passed too close to me!"

By way of ascertaining whether his companion was dead or not, Wild gave him a by no means gentle blow in the ribs with the butt of the musket.

A deep groan followed.

"Then you are not dead yet?" said Wild. "Then get up, will you?"

Another blow followed.

"Get up!" he continued, "or you will be black and blue! Don't lie there like a fool!"

With many dismal groans and half-suppressed shrieks, Mr. Noakes rose to his feet.

"Now, how are you?" asked Jonathan.

"I'm shot!"

"Gammon!"

"I am!"

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"Then find out, will you?—I don't think there is anything the matter!"



[JONATHAN WILD DASHES THE ALE MEASURE IN THE OSTLER'S FACE.]

Mr. Noakes shook his head dismally, after which he came to the conclusion that that portion of his anatomy was in its accustomed place.

He then worked his arm about in a most extraordinary and comical manner, and then his other arm.

He treated his legs in a similar fashion, and then, with another hideous groan, he exclaimed:

"Oh, I am badly hurt!"

"Where? I don't believe it!"

"Feel my back!" cried the Governor—"feel my back!"

"I will; but it will be with the butt end of this musket!"

"No, no—don't!"

"It is all imagination!—I don't believe you are hurt at all!"

Mr. Noakes worked all his limbs about for some time longer, and finally came to the same conclusion.

"Now then!" cried Jonathan, who was as full of energy as ever—"now then, come on, without you desire to be captured! The report of that musket could have been

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heard a mile off, and how can we tell whose ears it may have reached—there may be officers about for all we can tell! Come on, I say, or I will go without you!"

Wild seized hold of the Governor's arm, and dragged him forcibly forward.

Mr. Noakes had lately had so many proofs of Jonathan Wild's powers, that he was terrified to death at the idea of being left alone; for, by himself, he well knew he should be no match for his enemies.

Therefore, when Wild gripped hold of his arm, the Governor bounded forward at a speed that was really quite remarkable.

Jonathan looked all around him with considerable apprehension, and he stopped every now and then to listen.

He was under the impression that his foes were lurking about in the vicinity, and, as he had truly said, the report of the gun could be heard for an immense distance over the silent fields.

No alarm, however, appeared to have been given, and,

with something like satisfaction about his heart, the thief-taker strode forward.

He felt the change in his position keenly, and more than ever he thought how many poor wretches he had hunted about the country, even as he was being hunted.

Nevertheless, on this night he felt fresh and vigorous, and now and then the idea would vaguely come over him that, at some distant period, he should once more occupy his old position.

The prospect of again possessing the power he once had was indeed a great consolation to him, and it buoyed up his hopes exceedingly.

With a savage feeling of delight, he would promise himself how he would use his power if he once had it.

What a full and deadly vengeance he would have upon all those who had in any way raised their hands against him!

He amused himself by naming them one by one, and deciding what kind of punishment should be awarded to them.

We all have day-dreams, by which we while away and make more pleasant the dull monotony of our existence, and those were the day-dreams of Jonathan Wild.

The most sanguine person, however, would fail to see any likelihood of their fulfilment.

At a rapid rate, the fugitives took their way in a direct line across the fields.

Mr. Noakes was well aware of the futility of making any inquiries of his companion as to where he intended to go, and so he saved his breath for a better purpose.

During the time he had been sojourning in the mill, Wild had arranged his immediate proceedings.

He did not dare trust himself to look far into the future, for a thousand chance circumstances might arise which would have the effect of deranging all his plans.

At last, tired and out of breath, he came to a halt.

Mr. Noakes was glad to stop, for he was not equal to the exertions he had recently been called upon to make.

It was behind a hedge that Wild stopped, just on the other side of which was a broad high-road.

Mr. Noakes immediately sunk down on the grass, where he lay gasping for breath.

Jonathan himself was somewhat winded, but, as soon as he could recover his breath, he said, with a grin at his comrade's distress:

"You seem knocked up, Noakes?"

"I am—I am!"

"You will get used to this in time."

"Never—never!"

"But you will!"

"Mr. Wild!"

"What?"

"Do give heed to what I say! I am in earnest—indeed I am in earnest!"

"What about?"

"This scampering over the country, and fighting police officers continually!"

"Do you mean to give in?"

"I don't know about that, but I can't stand it! I must have rest!"

"Bah!"

"I must! If you are iron, I am not!"

Wild smiled grimly at this allusion to his own endurance.

"I can stand a great deal!" he said.

"Much more than I can—much more than I can! I am dead beat now!"

"Noakes!"

"What?"

"Can you ride?"

"On horseback do you mean?"

"Yes."

"I can manage to stick in the saddle."

"That is all that is required, then. You would sooner ride than walk, I suppose?"

"Rather!"

"Then we will!"

"But where are our horses?"

"We must obtain some."

"How?"

"Never mind! Leave that to me!"

"You will get two?"

"Yes."

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Wild!"

"I would have had two before if I had had the least idea that you were master of the accomplishment of riding. Are you better now?"

"Yes, a great deal!"

"Then we will look after the horses next thing. Get up!"

With a groan, Mr. Noakes obeyed.

"Now follow me!" continued Wild. "Before many hours are over, we shall have a horse apiece!"

Mr. Noakes had no idea how this was to be done, but he had learned to place implicit faith in his villainous companion.

When Wild uttered the words "Follow me," he walked up to the hedgerow, and coming presently to a gap in it, he pushed his way through.

Mr. Noakes came after him.

They were now standing in the Oxford Road, and at a point not very far distant from the metropolis.

The Governor looked about him apprehensively.

It seemed to him such a daring feat to venture to enter the high-road at all.

Wild looked about him also, but there was no terror about his heart.

"Hush!" he cried, suddenly—"hush!"

As he spoke he suddenly laid himself at full length upon the earth.

He pressed his ear close to the ground, and listened for nearly a minute, every second of which seemed an hour to Mr. Noakes.

Then, springing to his feet, he said:

"Back—back! Creep through the hedge again—be quick!"

"What's the matter?"

"Officers are coming—or a large body of horsemen at all events! They are not more than a mile off, and will soon be here! They are coming on at a fast trot!"

The Governor did not wait to hear the conclusion of Wild's speech.

With one bound he dashed through the hedge, perfectly heedless as to the scratches and other hurts that he received.

Jonathan followed him quickly.

As is generally the case, the hedge which divided the meadow from the highway was planted on the top of an artificial bank about two feet in height.

Mr. Noakes laid himself down at full length, pressing himself with all his might against the foot of the embankment.

Jonathan, however, stood upright, because he knew very well that there was little or no fear of him being seen.

After the lapse of a few moments the beat of the horses' hoofs upon the hard road became distinctly audible.

As Mr. Noakes laid down, the clattering of the iron-bound hoofs seemed to shake the very earth.

He was greatly alarmed.

"What the devil are you trembling for like that?", asked Wild.

"Hush—hush!" gasped the Governor, in a whisper.

"Are you frightened?"

"The officers are coming!"

"I know that; but we are in no danger! They have no means of telling that we are hidden here! They will never suspect such a thing if you, with your d—d foolery, don't do something to betray our hiding-place!"

"I will be as still and silent as the dead!"

"Then, if so, we have nothing whatever to fear. Hush—do not speak again or move until you hear me speak to you! That will be when all danger is past."

Mr. Noakes was silent at once.

The officers, if such they were, came on quickly.

Jonathan had not much doubt upon the point, for at that hour of the night it was not likely that a large body of horsemen would be journeying along the road.

The thief-taker sank down on his knees so that his face was close to the bottom of the hedge.

He was then able to command a view of the road before him, as it was perfectly easy to peep through the interstices of the hedge, though it was next to, if not quite, impossible that he should be seen by the officers.

On they came without any abatement of speed, which increased the feeling of security in Wild's breast.

A few moments passed, and then they came in sight.

Wild tried to count them as they went by, but they were too numerous.

Still he guessed their number to be about twenty.

They were officers.

He could tell that by their accoutrements.

They passed by the spot where the fugitives were hiding without either accelerating or diminishing their speed.

Evidently they had not the least suspicion that Wild and Noakes were concealed so close to them.

The last officer passed, and then Wild had the pleasure of listening to the abatement of the sound as they got further and further off.

He waited until the hoofbeats had become almost inaudible in the distance, and then, but not till then, did he venture to address his still-terrified companion in crime.

"All right once more," said Wild, as he touched the Governor with his foot.

Mr. Noakes raised his head.

"Get up!" added Wild.

"Is the danger past?"

"Yes, the officers are far off down the road."

"What a relief! You are sure none have been left behind to lurk about?"

"Quite. I watched them too closely for that. Get up! The next thing that we have to do is to get a couple of horses already saddled and bridled; I don't think we need fear of being disturbed, as we have seen the officers so recently!"

"But how shall we get the horses?"

"Come through the gap in the hedge again, and when you get on to the high-road you will see."

CHAPTER DXXII.

JONATHAN WILD COMMITS A COLD-BLOODED AND TREACHEROUS MURDER ON THE HIGHWAY.

NOT without many misgivings, Mr. Noakes made his way into the high-road once more.

"Crouch down," said Wild, "in the shadow of the hedge, and remain perfectly quiet—that is all the share I want you to take in the little transaction!"

"Very good!"

"And don't be frightened, because you have really nothing to be alarmed about—all is well!"

Mr. Noakes crouched down in the dry ditch under the shadow of the hedge, and remained silent, as he had been bidden.

Wild placed himself by his side, also crouching down in the darkness so that he could not be seen.

His next proceeding was to look to the priming and loading of a pistol.

Mr. Noakes looked on and observed all these proceedings with mingled wonder and fear.

He was yet at a loss to know how Wild intended to achieve his purpose.

Having seen that his pistol was in proper order, Wild held it in such a manner as to be able to make instant use of it if required.

He then remained perfectly still, though his attitude was a listening one.

In this manner nearly half-an-hour passed by, and the Governor began to feel terribly cramped, by being forced to retain his awkward position for so long.

He was about to move, when a faint sound struck upon his ear.

Wild heard it too, though he did not show it either by word or act.

The sound soon resolved itself into something distinguishable, and after a short time, unused as he was to such matters, Mr. Noakes could tell that a single traveller was approaching.

He was coming from the direction of London, and was rapidly nearing the spot where Wild lay in ambush.

Mr. Noakes fixed his gaze upon the thief-taker.

He could see his eyes shining like those of some predatory animal.

He held the pistol to a level.

Noakes wondered what were the thoughts of the man who was riding on so quickly.

Were there any strange feelings about his heart?—did the invisible essence of his being feel that some danger was about to overtake the physical frame?

Whether the traveller felt any misgivings or not, would, however, be hard to say.

If he did experience any presentiment of coming evil, he regarded it not, and came riding on at the same steady rate as before.

Both villains had been long enough in their hiding-place for their eyes to become accustomed to the gloom. They could see every object within a reasonable distance with perfect distinctness.

At last the traveller came in sight.

At first it was but a moving, shadowy mass that they beheld advancing rapidly towards them, but soon it resolved itself into the outlines of a horse and rider.

Gradually they became more and more distinct, until they could even see that it was a young man who was thus hastening to his doom.

His coat was richly embroidered, and many diamonds glittered here and there upon his person, sending out faint scintillations of light like mimic stars.

Slowly Jonathan Wild rose to his feet.

The pistol was extended to the full length of his arm.

Then he waited until the traveller was opposite to him. As soon as ever this was the case, Wild took one step forward.

At the same moment he pulled the trigger.

There was a bright flash and a report.

Wild's aim was accurate.

A wild, unearthly kind of shriek came from the lips of the ill-fated traveller.

It mingled strangely with the report of the pistol.

The instant he had fired, Wild bounded into the road and seized the terrified horse by the bridle.

It was a splendid, high-spirited creature, and no sooner did it feel Wild touch the reins than it reared and struck out desperately with its fore feet.

But Wild was on his guard, and so escaped injury.

Not so the traveller.

When his horse reared he fell with a crash into the roadway, where he lay to all appearances bereft of life.

Mr. Noakes experienced a shock to his nervous system when he beheld this cold-blooded, treacherous murder.

Even he shrank from obtaining a horse by such means. Jonathan, however, had but one feeling in the matter.

That was delight at having so well succeeded in effecting his purpose.

In less than a moment he managed to quiet the horse, and then, in a suppressed voice, he said:

"Noakes—Noakes! Where are you?"

"Here!" was the trembling reply.

"Come this way, then!"

Mr. Noakes approached.

"What do you want, Mr. Wild?"

"Just stoop down and see whether he is dead. If he is, all well and good! Then feel if he has anything in his pockets!"

Had he been allowed any choice in the matter, Mr. Noakes would rather not have had anything to do with the assassinated traveller; but he felt constrained to obey Wild's commands.

Staggering forward until he came to the prostrate form, he stooped down, and after a momentary hesitation placed his hand upon the traveller's breast.

He was unable to feel the slightest pulsation.

"Is he dead?" asked Wild.

"I think so."

"And a good job!"

Mr. Noakes shuddered.

"It is awful!" he ejaculated.

"Bah! Be quick, and search his pockets! Take whatever you can find of any value, and I will help you to kick the body into the ditch! Make haste, without you want us to be discovered by some passer-by!"

With trembling hand, Mr. Noakes searched the pockets of the murdered traveller.

He had evidently been of some distinction, for he carried about him many articles of great value, such as would be found only on the person of a rich man.

These articles Mr. Noakes transferred to his pocket with rather extraordinary rapidity.

Probably he thought the best thing he could do was to get a disagreeable job over as quickly as possible.

It is, however, certain that in something less than a minute he completed his task.

"Have you done?" asked Jonathan.

"Yes."

"Into the ditch with him!"

"You promised to help me to do that!"

"Into the ditch with him, I say! D—n it, do you presume to disobey my orders?"

"No; but——"

"Into the ditch with him, then!" cried Wild, furiously. "Can't you see I have enough to do to keep this infernal horse still?"

And indeed the thief-taker had great difficulty in quieting the traveller's horse.

The noble creature seemed to be aware that some evil had befallen its rider, and that Jonathan was the cause of it.

It plunged and reared, and paid not the least attention to Wild's caressing words and gestures.

This tried Jonathan's temper not a little, and he would have perpetrated some brutal trick, only he happened to be aware that in such cases violence would be sure to fail, and that the only chance he had of overcoming the creature was by using gentle means.

But he patted and stroked all to no purpose.

With a heavy groan the Governor prepared himself to carry out Wild's further mandate.

He liked this less than anything he had done; but he dared not say no.

Jonathan's violence already terrified him.

Taking hold, then, of the unfortunate gentleman by the feet, he dragged him along the road towards the ditch.

It so happened that he had not many feet to go to the nearest hedge, which was on the side of the road opposite to that upon which they had placed themselves in ambush.

This ditch, then, was unlike the other, for it was wide, apparently deep, and filled with water, upon the surface of which floated that strange vegetation which is found covering stagnant ponds as with a coating of green slime.

Mr. Noakes dragged the traveller quite to the edge of this ditch, and having done so, he stooped down.

With one vigorous push, then, he sent the body into the stagnant ditch.

The green coating was disturbed, and the water which showed itself beneath looked inky black, and emitted a most horrible stench.

In the twinkling of an eye the body disappeared.

But just as it came in contact with the filthy water, a deep, gurgling, half-smothered groan came from the traveller's lips.

Mr. Noakes echoed this groan with a loud cry, for he had fully believed the man was dead.

That such was not the case was, however, quite evident; but that he could survive while lying at the bottom of the ditch, powerless to make the least movement, was simply impossible.

Jonathan uttered an oath as Mr. Noakes's shout fell upon his ears, for not only was it calculated to attract discovery, but it had the effect of materially adding to the terror under which the horse was already labouring.

He threatened to become quite unmanageable, and the thief-taker feared that after all, now he had got the horse, he would turn out no use to him.

"He wasn't dead!" gasped Noakes, in defence of himself.

"And if he wasn't, what the devil did you make that row for? Come and try if you can help me to pacify this horse, and don't stand there like a d—d fool!"

"But it gave me such a turn!"

"Bah! If he wasn't dead, he soon will be! The ditch-water won't agree very well with the contents of his stomach!"

Mr. Noakes thought so too, but, bad as he was, he could not help shuddering at the atrocity his companion displayed.

He went towards him, though, and after a great deal of trouble they succeeded in calming the frightened horse.

"Wait till he is out of this fright," said Wild, savagely. "Wait till I am on his back, and I will be even with him!"

"Be careful, Mr. Wild,—he seems a vicious creature!"

"Does he?"

"He does."

"You are glad, then, that I am going to ride him and not hand him over to you?"

"I am, and I would advise you to be careful."

"Bah! there is no horse alive that can throw me if I once get on his back. Then you would rather trust to your own legs for a little while longer?"

"Decidedly."

"Then you shall do so! Hold his head while I mount."

Mr. Noakes obeyed, and Wild tried to put his foot in the stirrup.

It was in vain, however.

The horse resolutely refused to allow him to mount.

Jonathan cursed and swore in a most frightful manner.

"If you will take my advice," said Mr. Noakes, who had great difficulty in retaining his hold upon the bridle, and preventing the horse from running away—"if you will take my advice, you will let the brute go!"

"You be d—d!" rejoined Jonathan. "Do you think I am such an idiot as to allow myself to be mastered by a horse? Not a bit of it."

Jonathan made several more attempts to mount, but they were all utter failures.

Mr. Noakes again entreated him to desist from the attempt.

Wild refused to listen.

"Hold him a minute!" he cried. "If I don't get on the brute's back, it's d—d odd to me!"

Jonathan was quite furious with rage at being thus set at defiance, and by a dumb animal, too—one that he believed he could easily hold in subjection.

Casting his eyes round, he saw not many paces off a tree that grew by the wayside.

From this tree one branch projected across the road in a remarkably horizontal manner.

No sooner did his eye fall upon this than he was seized with a fresh idea.

The branch was about seven feet—perhaps rather more—from the ground.

Running forward with impetuosity, Wild gave a spring into the air.

He managed to grasp the branch with his fingers, but by a second effort he improved and strengthened his hold.

Mr. Noakes watched all these proceedings with astonishment, and apparently so did the horse, for it was much quieter than it had been.

Its expanded eyeballs were, however, fixed upon Jonathan Wild.

Towards Mr. Noakes it did not manifest near so much dislike.

Jonathan, having seized hold of the branch in the manner we have described, drew himself up by the aid of the muscles in his arms until his breast was on a level with it.

"Now, Noakes," he cried, still in furious accents, "bring the horse along!"

"Where to, sir?"

"Why, to me, of course! Lead him under the branch of this tree, and when I am just over the saddle, stop him and hold him tight."

These words were quite sufficient to let the Governor understand what it was that Jonathan intended to do.

Accordingly he led the horse forward, and though he lost no time in doing this, yet Wild cursed him bitterly for his delay.

The horse suffered Mr. Noakes to lead him onward without offering much resistance.

He shrank back, however, when he came near to the body of Wild hanging from the tree.

By speaking in encouraging accents, and patting him upon the neck, Mr. Noakes managed to lead him on.

The very moment the body of the horse was beneath him, Jonathan Wild, who had stretched out his legs in readiness, dropped with a heavy and sudden shock into the saddle.

The horse uttered a snort of terror, and broke from the hold of Mr. Noakes, who was dashed to the earth.

But now he was mounted, Wild did not care.

He could safely defy the horse to throw him.

Gripping the saddle with his knees, he just took hold of the reins lightly, making no effort to restrain the animal's headlong speed.

He vanished from the view of his comrade instantly.

The thoroughly terrified and half-maddened creature made many abortive attempts to throw its rider.

They were all in vain, for Jonathan kept his seat in a

manner that would have done credit to a trained jockey.

In his mouth Jonathan held a stout stick.

Taking hold of this in his right hand, he belaboured the horse with it in a perfectly brutal manner.

He was now gratifying himself by a little revenge.

Very soon the horse showed symptoms of being vanquished.

It trembled and became obedient to the rein.

Wild still continued his beating, nor did he cease until his arm ached so excessively that he had not strength to raise it and give another blow.

When this was the case, he turned the horse's head round, and trotted him gently to the spot where had left his companion.

The horse was perfectly docile and obedient.

CHAPTER DXXIII.

JONATHAN WILD HAS SOME DANGEROUS ADVENTURES ON THE HIGHWAY.

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Wild!" ejaculated Mr. Noakes, in tones of genuine admiration—"you are a wonderful man!"

"What! for mastering this brute?"

"Yes."

"There was nothing in that!"

"How came you to think of that ingenious way of getting on to his back?"

"I saw the trick once done by a jockey, and I luckily remembered it. Will you have the horse, or shall I look out for another one for you?"

"Look out for another one? But, Mr. Wild——"

"What?"

"Don't—don't!"

"Don't what, idiot?"

"Don't deprive a man of his life simply that you may get a horse!"

"You are growing considerate, Noakes! Bah! Don't be a fool! Another horse we must and will have, and we are not the right sort to stand upon trifles,—it would be folly for us to do so!"

"But you could get a horse without murder."

"We shall see. Come on a little further down the road. We won't perform two exploits in the same place. I will walk the horse slowly, so that you will easily be able to keep pace with him."

To this Mr. Noakes assented, and the villanous pair took their way along the road in the direction of Oxford.

After they had gone about a mile they came to a very shady piece of road, and here Wild halted.

"Now, Noakes," he said, "I will get you a horse. All you have to do is to keep out of sight—to hear, see, and say nothing! I will manage the little affair alone!"

"But not by murder?"

"Hold your row! Can't you hear somebody coming?"

Sure enough, a traveller was coming along the road.

He was journeying towards London, and in a few minutes would reach the shady piece of road where the two villains were.

Jonathan was seated on his horse in perfect readiness to ride forth as soon as ever the traveller should arrive opposite to him.

In a little while he saw him.

Darting forward, Wild cried, with great suddenness:

"Pull up!—stop, or you are a dead man!"

The traveller reined in his steed with great abruptness, and, before Wild had the least idea of what he was about or what he intended to do, fired a pistol point-blank in his face.

Jonathan's hat was blown off his head, and for a minute or two he scarcely knew whether he was dead or alive.

Nor did the traveller wait to see, for as soon as he fired he clapped spurs to his horse's flanks, and was out of sight in no time.

So suddenly did all this happen, that for once in his life at least Jonathan Wild was completely taken by surprise.

When, at length, he recovered himself, the traveller was

out of sight, and the clattering of his horse's feet upon the roadway could only be faintly heard.

Mr. Noakes could not tell whether Jonathan was dead or alive.

How it was that he managed to escape all injury from the shot that was fired at him is a mystery.

He never could explain it himself.

The bullet must have passed him in unpleasantly close proximity—there can be no doubt about that.

As soon as ever he found that he was unhurt, the first thing he did was to pour out a most awful string of curses.

Mr. Noakes prudently kept out of sight until Wild's passion somewhat abated.

At length he stepped forward, and in a hesitating voice he said:

"You have had a narrow escape, Mr. Wild! I made sure you were killed!"

"And if I had been, what should you have cared?"

To have answered truthfully, Mr. Noakes would have been compelled to pronounce the word "Nothing."

Upon all occasions, however, it is not good policy to tell the exact truth, and Mr. Noakes was right in thinking that this was an occasion when a little subterfuge would be beneficial.

"I should have cared a great deal, Mr. Wild," he replied, in a wheedling tone of voice.

"Don't believe it!"

"It's true, Mr. Wild! What could I do without you? Had I been alone, I should have fallen into the hands of the officers long ago, and you know that!"

"It will be a serious thing for you when you do lose me!" replied the thief-taker.

"I know it—I know it! Are you sure you are unhurt, Mr. Wild?"

Jonathan was not quite sure, but he was certain his injuries were slight.

He felt his head carefully, and discovered that the bullet from the traveller's pistol had ploughed up the skin at one side of his skull.

"It's nothing," he said—"nothing at all!"

"How I rejoice!"

"Hold your hypocritical row, do! But wait till the next man rides by! I'll have his horse, or it's odd to me!"

"Don't murder him!"

"Shut up!"

"I could not ride a dead man's horse!"

"Then use your own legs if you are so damnably squeamish. Perhaps you'll get a horse yourself?"

"I cannot!"

"Will you run by the side of mine?"

"I cannot!"

"Then, d—n you for a fool, let me get one for you!"

Mr. Noakes said no more.

Almost immediately the trampling of horses' hoofs became heard, and Jonathan cried out:

"Back into the ditch with you!—back, I say!"

Mr. Noakes retreated, and Jonathan compelled his horse to walk backwards until his hind legs were in the ditch by the roadside.

Another traveller was coming.

Wild was in readiness, determined not to be taken by surprise this time, as he had been before.

A few moments passed away, and then they caught sight of the approaching horseman.

He was urging his steed both by whip and spur to make its utmost speed.

It almost looked as though he was aware danger was lurking in the vicinity, and that he was making haste to get past it.

So pleased was Wild apparently with his first attempt, that he determined to repeat the same plan of operations.

He had his pistol in readiness, and, as soon as the traveller was near enough, he fired.

As Wild waited until the unfortunate man was close to him, it was scarcely possible that he could miss his mark.

He did not.

With a groan the rider fell to the ground, and Jonathan galloped forward just in time to catch the horse by the bridle.

The two villains were now in possession of a couple of capital horses.

Mr. Noakes was dreadfully shocked at this second murder.

Wild's shot was not instantly fatal, for the man lay writhing in the roadway uttering many dismal groans, and making many abortive efforts to rise to his feet.

Jonathan secured the horse, and then cried:

"Now, Noakes, just look after the pockets, and then mount. I will hold your horse the while."

The Governor uttered a groan, but came tremblingly towards the prostrate man.

He stooped down and strove to catch a glimpse of the traveller's countenance.

He was an old man, with a profusion of silvery hair, which streamed in confusion over his countenance, giving to his distorted features an aspect of peculiar ghastliness.

"Help—help!" he cried, faintly, upon seeing the Governor bending over him—"help!—help!—I am dying!"

Mr. Noakes shook like a leaf.

"Help!" cried the wounded man again. "Oh, heaven, —I die!"

"Noakes, you d—d villain!" roared the thief-taker—"why don't you search his pockets? Do you intend to stand there like a fool till the officers come?"

"I am a-doing of it, sir—I am a-doing of it, Mr. Wild!"

As he spoke, Mr. Noakes placed one hand upon the breast of the murdered traveller.

"Help—help!" was the same cry, and he writhed on the ground like a snake. "Ellen—Ellen—my own dear, much-loved Ellen! I die! Farewell! I shall see you now! My bitterest curse upon my murderers! I was told highwaymen were on the road. Help—help! I—"

"Noakes," cried the thief-taker, "do you set me at defiance?"

"I can't do it!" replied the Governor, and as he spoke he rose to his feet and made a rapid retreat. "He's alive, and cursing his murderer. I can't touch him!"

Jonathan uttered a cry of mingled anger and contempt.

"Alive, is he?" he asked, "and cursing his murderer? Bah! We will soon put a stop to that!"

So saying, Wild struck his spurs deeply into his horse's flanks, and caused him to bound forward.

The body of the traveller lay exactly in the horse's path, so that he could not avoid placing his hoofs upon it.

No sooner did he find that the traveller was beneath his horse's feet than Wild pulled the rein violently, causing the terrified animal to rear high up into the air.

Down it came on to its feet again, but the iron-bound hoofs came into violent contact with the head of the ill-fated man.

There was an awful, blood-chilling cry of agony, and then all was over.

The traveller was dead.

"Now," said Wild, with a demoniac laugh, "he won't trouble you any more by cursing his murderer. He is as dead as a nut. Will you empty his pockets now, d—n you?"

But Mr. Noakes was quite overcome by this last specimen of the thief-taker's bloodthirsty ferocity.

He shrank from the crushed and mangled body with ten thousand times more horror and loathing than before.

But so great was his dread of what his villanous companion might do—so thoroughly was he awed by what had taken place—that he found his terror obtain the ascendancy over every other feeling; and so, with faltering steps, he approached the spot upon which the dead body lay.

"Quick, you cowardly villain!" cried Wild,—"quick, or you will be too late! Every moment I expect to hear the sounds of the approach of the police officers. Be quick, I say!"

Once more did Mr. Noakes stoop down over the blood-stained corpse.

Availing his eyes from the awful spectacle, and guided solely by his sense of feeling, the Governor performed his horrible task of feeling in the pockets for any articles of value.

There was not much to recompense him for his trouble.

A purse containing a few guineas, a pocket-book, some loose silver, and a watch; but this last was irretrievably damaged by the horse's hoofs.

It was a great relief to the Governor when this was over, and he uttered a sigh of satisfaction as he said:

"It is done!"

"Now pull him to one side of the road,—roll him into the ditch: then mount. It is time we were off! We should have been miles away if you had not been such a d—d fool and coward as you are!"

Mr. Noakes could not, with all the influence that fear had over him, bring himself to touch the body with his hands.

But the body must be moved, so he kicked it with his feet.

There was no convenient ditch with plenty of water in it, so he was obliged to leave the body by the wayside.

"Mount!" said the thief-taker, impatiently—"mount!"

Mr. Noakes felt terrified at the thought of getting upon the back of the horse whose master had met with so cruel a fate.

Had he said so, however, he would have done nothing but provoke the derision of Jonathan Wild, and perhaps bring down upon himself some personal ill-usage.

Overcoming, then, these scruples in the same manner as he had had to overcome many more, Mr. Noakes, with serious misgivings about his heart, placed his foot in the stirrup and mounted.

"Off and away!" cried Wild. "Off and away!"

He turned his horse's head in the direction of the country as he spoke.

Mr. Noakes observed this with joy, that was none the less because it was not manifested.

"This has been an awful night!" he said.

"Bah!"

"I wonder who that last gentleman was? Poor fellow, —I am sorry for him!"

"What business is it of ours who he is? We have got what we want. Is not that sufficient?"

Mr. Noakes made no precise reply, but he remarked:

"It has been a night full of horrors, and I hope I shall never know another like it!"

"Wait, and you will see! I rather think posterity will remember Jonathan Wild!"

CHAPTER DXXIV.

JONATHAN WILD THINKS FIT TO TAKE MR. NOAKES A LITTLE MORE INTO HIS CONFIDENCE.

THERE can be little doubt that a great deal of the cold-blooded atrociousness that Jonathan Wild exhibited on this occasion was assumed in consequence of a certain savage delight he might feel at noting the behaviour of his less callous companion.

For the sake of common humanity, let us hope that this is the true solution of his conduct, for surely it would be impossible to find a parallel to such barbarity.

After uttering the words with which the last chapter concluded, Jonathan Wild dug his spurs into his horse's sides with savage pleasure at finding there was yet some living object that he could inflict pain upon.

With a snort of pain, the magnificent creature flew off at a gallop.

The horse which Mr. Noakes bestrode appeared called upon by instinct to do as the other did, for, without any incentive on its rider's part, it galloped on by the side of its companion.

In this manner several miles of roadway were passed over in a very short space of time indeed.

Suddenly, Jonathan Wild drew rein.

Headlong as his course appeared to be, he nevertheless had all his senses about him and in full operation.

Hitherto they had met with no obstruction whatever, but now Jonathan leaned forward in the saddle, and, placing his hand behind his ear, listened eagerly.

Mr. Noakes listened too.

"There is some one on the road," said Wild; "I can hear them plainly."

"So can I."

"Then if that is the case, it is only reasonable to as-

sume that they can hear us. I hope they have not done so. If they have, we shall be in an awkward fix."

"What shall you do?"

"Hush!"

Wild listened again.

"Yes," he added, after a brief pause, "they are coming—they are surely coming! They are officers! Follow me! We may have to run for our lives!"

Mr. Noakes heard this intelligence with a groan.

"This life will kill me!" he murmured,—"I feel sure of it!"

In the meanwhile, Jonathan stood up in the stirrups, in order that he might be the better able to see about him.

A few paces further on down the road, he saw a finger-post with arms pointing to four different directions.

"Walk," he said, addressing his companion, "and get your horse to tread as lightly as you can. Hush!"

Jonathan set his companion the example of what he was to do.

As soon as he reached the finger-post he paused.

It was easy to ascertain in what direction the officers were coming; and having done so, Wild chose that road which led off into the heart of the country.

The police officers were coming along in slashing style, and the sound made by their horses' hoofs grew more and more distinct with alarming rapidity.

"Walk your horse for a few moments," said Jonathan, hurriedly, to his companion, "and keep close under the hedgerow where the grass is growing. They won't be so well able then to tell where we are."

Mr. Noakes nodded his head, to show that he fully understood and acquiesced in what his companion had said. This mode of proceeding was adopted.

It was certainly a wise one, though, at the same time, there was a degree of risk attached to it, because it allowed the officers to get nearer and nearer.

Still Wild was by no means sure that they had heard anything—if they had, the sound could only have been faint and indistinct.

Had he put his horse to a gallop, however, the clear, ringing sound which in the country is audible for such a long distance, would have reached the ears of the officers, and, guided by it, they would have commenced an immediate pursuit.

But when they reached the spot where the roads intersected each other, the chances were all against their being able to hear anything at all.

As is frequently the case in cross-country roads, there was a space at each side under the hedge, upon which the grass grew in great luxuriance.

On this soft turf the horses' feet made scarcely any sound.

But as they proceeded, Jonathan and Mr. Noakes could hear the officers approaching with disagreeable plainness.

At last Wild heard them halt, and when he did so, he thought it was time to halt too.

He listened, for, of course, all depended upon which way the officers took.

If they continued on towards London, all well and good—he would be out of danger.

The impatience and anxiety with which he waited for the result may therefore be imagined.

The officers did not remain stationary more than a moment.

They set themselves in motion.

Wild scarcely breathed.

"Fortune favours the brave!" he said at last, in tones of suppressed exultation. "They are off towards London! The danger is past!"

"Are you sure?" asked Mr. Noakes, as a man might put the question after receiving the intelligence that he was relieved after having been sentenced to death—"are you quite sure?"

"Yes, they are off to London. Hurrah! they have missed us!"

Jonathan could scarcely restrain his glee.

"What are we to do next?" the Governor at last ventured to ask. "I do not like being kept in the dark like this. We cannot keep this game up, I'm sure of that."

"What game, idiot?"

"This dodging about the country. We shall be nabbed at last."

"Bah!"

"It is all very fine for you to treat the matter with affected contempt."

"Have we not escaped as yet?"

"Yes."

"Then let that content you."

"It does not and will not, because each escape that we have had has been more dangerous and narrow than the one which preceded it."

Jonathan Wild could not help admitting to himself that there was a great deal of truth in what his companion said, but although he felt this conviction his only reply was:

"You are a d—d coward, Noakes!"

"I am not so courageous as you, I admit. It would be impossible to find anyone more heedless of danger than yourself!"

Jonathan grinned.

This was one of his weak points, and he was susceptible to flattery.

"Well—well, Noakes!" he replied, in a mollified tone.

"We may as well have matters pleasant between us as not."

"A great deal better."

"As you say, a great deal better. So we will try to argue. Our position is much improved. You have a good horse and so have I. We are consequently now better able to cope with our foes than before."

"Very true; but for all that we sha'n't be able to keep the game up. What we have done to-night will cause no slight commotion. Officers will be sent out in greater force than ever, and the upshot of the whole affair is, that we shall be surrounded—hemmed in on all sides by them, and then—why then it's nabbed we should be to a dead certainty!"

Mr. Noakes worked himself up to quite a pitch of desperate excitement, though he shuddered visibly when he mentioned the transactions of the evening.

Jonathan put his finger by the side of his nose in an attitude of profound thought.

At last he spoke.

"Noakes," he said, "you have a great deal more sense than I ever gave you credit for possessing. I don't scruple to say it, because it's a fact."

"I am glad you think so."

"We will be more amicable in future. I can foresee that we shall get on well together. I don't want to be nabbed."

"Nor I."

"Of course you don't, and I have a great deal to do. But it will keep, and, what is more, it won't spoil by keeping."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind. It is no concern of yours. But the pursuit after us will be made very hot indeed, and, as you say, we are only two against a very great many."

"The odds are overwhelming."

"I will tell you what we will do."

"I hope you will, for I can assure you it is far from pleasant to be dragged about hither and thither, and kept all the time in the dark as to the nature of our future proceedings."

"Well, well—all that shall be altered. Will you listen to what I have to say?"

"With pleasure."

"Silence, then. My proposition is a very simple one. It is, that we withdraw into the country for awhile and remain in some secluded spot until the energy and determination of the police abate somewhat. There are hundreds of places that would suit us in this respect."

"A very wise proposition, I am sure, Mr. Wild, and one that I heartily agree to!"

"Then we will start at once."

"With all my heart."

"If we keep ourselves quiet for a little while, we may perhaps be able to induce in our foes the belief that we have left the country."

"If we can do that, then all will be well."

"I have no doubt we shall succeed."

"It does me good to hear those words. It does not suit me to be hunted after, and to be murdering people continually."

"Don't be chicken-hearted, Noakes. I consider we have got two horses very cheaply indeed. We re now in a

position to offer our enemies defiance, and be on equal terms with them when they commence a pursuit."

"I can hear nothing of them now."

"No, they are far enough away upon the London Road. Come, touch your horse with the spur. Forward—forward!"

Mr. Noakes did not happen to have any spurs, but he struck his heels very fiercely against his horse's sides, and off they went at a gallop that would soon take them into the heart of the country, where doubtless they would be afforded many opportunities of concealing themselves.

There can be no doubt that this was the wisest determination Jonathan could have come to.

Unquestionably Mr. Noakes was quite right in all that he urged upon the subject.

It was a wonder, though, that Wild admitted it.

The thief-taker took upon himself to choose their route, and he chose that which would take him to a position north of the great metropolis.

In a little while they began to perceive in the east some indications of the coming day.

Owing to the speed at which they had travelled, their horses were much exhausted, and it became apparent that they required a brief rest.

But Jonathan did not feel inclined to come to a halt just at present, and he applied whip and spur more vigorously than before.

They continued on their journey over the country, choosing lonely, out-of-the-way cross-roads, until long after the sun had risen.

"I am infernally dry, Noakes!" said Wild, at last. "We must stop and have something to drink at the next inn we come to. I am choked!"

"So am I; and our horses are completely knocked up!"

"They are."

"But won't it be running a very great risk to stop anywhere?"

"Not very great, I think. You must remember we are a long way from London now."

"True."

"And therefore there is less fear of our being recognised."

"I leave it to you, Mr. Wild."

"Then we will stop. I don't think it will be altogether prudent to dismount, however."

"What shall you do, then?"

"Why, the first roadside inn I come to that seems likely to answer our purpose, we will stop before the door of. We can then call for something to drink, and the ostler will give our horses a mouthful of hay and a bucket of water."

"I think that will be best myself."

"There will not be so much risk, at any rate, as there would be if we were to sit down in a room and take up our quarters there for some time."

"Certainly not!"

"Then the sooner we come across such a public-house the better. After we have had our wants supplied, we will push on still further into the country. Then we will wait. I can afford to do so, for my revenge will ripen. I have swept my worst foe from the face of the earth, and the others will follow! I will lull them into a state of false security, and when they imagine all is well, I will come down upon them like a tiger!"

CHAPTER DXXV.

THE OSTLER OF THE ROADSIDE INN DISCOVERS THAT IT IS SOMETIMES UNWISE TO KNOW TOO MUCH.

AFTER speaking these words, Jonathan Wild rode on for some distance without making any further remark.

But if he was silent his thoughts were busy, and in imagination he was gloating over the injuries which he should be able to inflict upon those persons whom he was pleased to style his foes.

Mr. Noakes, however, felt inclined to be talkative, and, emboldened by his companion's apparent good humour, he exclaimed, suddenly:

"Mr. Wild!"

"What?"

"I have just been thinking."

"Well?"

This style of reply was not very encouraging,—nevertheless, the Governor persevered.

"I was thinking about what you had last been saying. I mean with respect to having got rid of your most troublesome foe."

"Well," said Wild again, as gruffly as before.

"I suppose you meant Jack Sheppard?"

"Of course I did."

"Well, he's dead and gone now. He will never trouble you any more!"

"I know that! What do you want to trouble about him for?"

"Oh, nothing! Only it struck me as being a very singular thing that your own troubles began when he was executed, and have continued ever since."

"You be d—d!"

Wild spoke thus to conceal his real feelings.

What his companion had said had long been patent to him, and very often he had wondered to himself whether he had not acted foolishly in consigning Jack Sheppard to the scaffold.

There was a strong undercurrent of superstition in Jonathan Wild's nature, and therefore it is not surprising that anything of this kind should make a deep impression upon him.

Strive as he would, he could not banish from his mind the idea that all his troubles and difficulties had resulted from his persecution of Jack Sheppard.

"If he had only been for me instead of being against me," he would murmur to himself, "how differently everything would have turned out."

Mr. Noakes relapsed into silence.

He could tell directly by Jonathan's manner that he was in an ill humour, and consequently it would be perilous in the highest degree to aggravate him.

Suddenly they came in sight of one of those rustic roadside public-houses, which in those days were often met with, but which now are rarely to be seen.

As soon as ever he perceived it, Jonathan Wild drew rein, in order to reconnoitre before he went any further.

He was pleased enough with what he saw.

An aspect of particular calm and contentment prevailed over the whole of the place, which came with a soothing effect upon the jaded senses of the thief-taker.

The inn had a thatched roof, upon which many birds were clustering, while others were wheeling round in giddy flight, or resting on the ground.

In front there was the usual trough filled with water for horses to drink, and adjacent to this was the tall post surmounted by a swinging sign resplendent with gold devices.

All this Jonathan saw from the distance, and the prospect pleased him greatly.

"Come on, Noakes!" he cried. "In this out-of-the-way place we shall be unknown, depend upon it! Come on!"

Once more they set their steeds in motion, and in less than two minutes afterwards the front of the inn was reached.

Truly did the presence of these two villains upon this fair spot seem like some foul blot upon it.

What right had two such miscreants to interrupt the harmony of the scene?

With a boldness for which he was remarkable, Wild bawled out at the top of his lungs:

"Halloa—halloa! House, there—house! Halloa!"

He well knew that by adopting such behaviour as this he should be disarming suspicion.

They would not have the appearance of proscribed fugitives which they otherwise would.

In response to this loud call, two individuals made their appearance.

One was the landlord of the inn.

The other the ostler.

"What do you please to want, gentlemen?" asked the former.

"A couple of mugs of ale," replied Wild, in a loud voice, and with an offhanded manner, "and something for our horses—a bit of hay and a drop of water."

"All right, gentlemen. Happy to accommodate you. Will you dismount? Your horses look tired."

"They are, but we can't halt yet!"

"Then you won't dismount?"

"No, we will take the ale here."

"As you like, gentlemen. I am at your commands."

The landlord turned into the inn, and the ostler hurried off for the hay and water.



MR. NOAKES HAS A SUDDEN DOWNFALL.

While they were gone, Jonathan looked all about him.

But not a living soul was in sight.

All was silent save the chirping of the birds and the thousand and one murmurs which in the country all combine into one drowsy hum.

Reassured by this, Jonathan Wild waited with considerable impatience for the reappearance of the landlord.

He was very thirsty, and the ale which he had ordered would be welcome in the extreme.

His patience was not put to a very severe trial.

"There's some of the finest October ale you have ever tasted, gentlemen," said the landlord, as he handed the mugs to the thief-taker and his companion.

Wild blew the froth off the top and emptied the vessel at one draught.

Drawing a long breath, he wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his coat, and holding the mug towards the landlord, said:

No. 111.—BLUESKIN.

"Fill it again."

The ostler now came up with the hay and water, for which the exhausted horses seemed extremely grateful.

But while he was engaged in feeding the animals, the ostler continually cast furtive glances upon Jonathan Wild, and it was not long before the thief-taker noticed it.

He concealed his uneasiness as well as he was able by drinking the second mug of ale which the landlord brought.

The ostler, however, who had been up to London only the day before, and had there heard the news with respect to Jonathan Wild, and also that a large reward was offered for his apprehension, recognised him.

He had seen Jonathan Wild many a time, and if he was at first in doubt as to his identity it was owing to the alteration which had taken place in the thief-taker's appearance.

Just as Wild finished drinking the ale, he felt certain

that the ostler knew him and would raise an immediate alarm.

But Wild determined to prevent this.

The ostler, who now doubted no longer, was about to place his hand upon the bridle of Wild's horse and then endeavour to drag the thief-taker from the saddle.

Before he could accomplish his purpose, Jonathan suddenly raised his arm and flung the heavy earthenware mug out of which he had been drinking full into the ostler's face.

The crash was terrific, and the ostler, after staggering about for a second or two like a drunken man, finally dropped to the earth, uttering howls and shrieks of pain.

The landlord was so astonished by this occurrence that he stood as if changed to stone.

Wild laughed horribly and exultingly when he saw how successful he had been.

"Off and away, Noakes," he cried, addressing his companion,—"off and away,—it won't do to stay here!"

He struck his horse sharply as he spoke, and the high-spirited creature, unused to such treatment, darted off at a violent pace.

The landlord, although much bewildered by the suddenness with which these unexpected events had taken place, nevertheless made an attempt to stop Mr. Noakes's horse.

He was hurled to the ground and trampled underfoot for his pains.

He was hurt, but not seriously, and lying still a moment, he scrambled to his feet and went towards the unfortunate ostler.

He found him uttering heavy groans.

His face was covered with blood, for such was the violence with which the mug was thrown at him that it was smashed to atoms.

"Wait a moment, and I will fetch some water."

He returned and bathed the poor fellow's face with the pure fluid.

As a matter of course, this had a reviving effect, but the pain he suffered was so great that he could not subdue his groans.

He also uttered many curses and revengeful threats.

"What does it all mean?" said the landlord, who was quite in the dark with regard to the whole transaction. "What were you doing to make him fling the mug in your face like that?"

"Doing? I was doing nothing—only I know'd him!"

"Know'd who?"

"Why, the villain that served me like this!"

"Who was it?"

"Why, Jonathan Wild, that I told you about. Didn't I say, when I came back from London, that a large reward was offered for his apprehension, dead or alive?"

"You did, Joe—you did; but was that really him?"

"It was. Bless you, I have seen him more times than I could count! He is altered a great deal, and that made me doubtful at first; but at last I felt sure he must have guessed what I was about to do, by the look of my face, for, before I was aware of it, he served me like this. Oh, curses!"

A fresh accession of pain from his bruised and mangled face caused the ostler to give vent to a volley of execrations, that strangely intermingled with groans and shrieks.

"But I will be revenged upon him for this!" he continued, as soon as the pain abated sufficiently to allow him to speak. "He shall wish his hand had dropped off before he flung the mug at me!"

"What shall you do, Joe—what shall you do?" asked the landlord. "It strikes me it will be a long while before you are able to move about!"

"Does it?" cried Joe, with sudden energy. "Then you'll be deceived! Where's the water?"

"It's all gone. I will fetch you some more."

"Do so—bring the stable bucket full—or stay! There's no need—the horse-trough will do as well!"

Very much, then, to the surprise of the landlord, the ostler sprang to his feet.

He could not have accomplished this feat had not rage lent him strength.

Staggering forward till he came to the horse-trough, he clutched it tightly with both hands, and plunged his head into the water.

It bubbled pleasantly about his ears, and the pain he suffered was lulled as if by magic.

He kept his head under the water as long as his breath would allow him, and then he turned round, looking and feeling much better.

"There's no time to be lost," he said. "Curse the villain! He shall not escape! I'll set the officers on his track, even if it costs me my life!"

In a frantic manner the ostler ran towards the stable, and in the twinkling of an eye emerged, leading by the halter a strong, good-looking horse.

"What on earth are you going to do, Joe?" asked the landlord.

"Fetch the officers!" replied the ostler, as he scrambled up on to the back of the horse.

As soon as he was seated, he struck the horse's flanks several violent blows with his heels, which caused him to set off at a gallop.

He had no saddle, and nothing to guide the horse with except the halter; but, in his present frame of mind, the ostler was not likely to be very careful, but rather inclined to take things as they came.

Away he flew, then, down the road, and was out of sight in a very short space of time.

It is probable that never before had anything happened with so much rapidity, and the landlord consequently was rather confused, and at a loss to understand the rights of the matter.

At a furious gallop, which caused him and his steed to be continually enveloped in a cloud of dust, the ostler hastened along the cross-road.

Presently, however, he heard the sound of other horses' feet, and looking before him, he saw a strong body of mounted police officers approaching.

He uttered a loud cry of gratification, and urged his horse to still greater speed.

When the officers saw him coming along the road at such a furious rate they separated and drew to each side of the road, so as to allow him a clear passage through their midst; but instead of continuing in his headlong career, the ostler pulled up with a sudden jerk.

"Jonathan Wild!" he shrieked, in an excited voice—"Jonathan Wild!"

Upon hearing this name the officers all pricked up their ears and gathered round the ostler.

"What's that you say about Jonathan Wild?" said the officer in command of the troop—"speak again!"

"Are you in search of Jonathan Wild?" asked the ostler.

"Yes, we've tracked him as far as here!"

"Follow me, then, and I'll show you which way he has gone!" cried the ostler. "Look at my face—can you see it? Jonathan Wild did that, and I'll have revenge!"

"You have seen him, then?"

"Yes, not a half an hour ago."

"And you know which way he has gone?"

"Yes, follow me! If we make good speed we shall overtake him! Come on, I say! I know all the roads for twenty miles round, and if we don't capture him it will not be my fault! Come on, I say—come on!"

"We are coming," said the officer, "and we shall be very glad of your services, which shall not go unpaid; we are determined to catch the brute! He committed no less than two murders last night!"

"And he nearly murdered me!" cried the ostler.

"Here are a couple of pistols," said the officer in command; "take them, and make use of them; the orders we have received are to take him dead or alive, it don't matter which—the former may be the best, for it will save a great deal of trouble, not only to us but to others, for if he is caught alive the country will be put to the expense of having him executed at Tyburn."

"Only let me get near enough, and I'll settle his business, never fear!"

At the word of command, the police officers all set themselves in motion, and at a very swift gallop they flew down the road, the infuriated ostler leading the way.

CHAPTER DXXVI.

JOE, THE OSTLER, AND MR. NOAKES BOTH MEET WITH A MISLAP.

MR. NOAKES beheld his companion's attack upon the ostler with much astonishment, and he was quite at a loss to conceive what the reason could be for such a proceeding.

He apprehended some danger, however, and, without pausing to reflect or speculate, followed Jonathan as soon as he was commanded to do so.

Wild did not permit his horse to relax his speed until he had gone several miles, when, coming at length to a very long and very steep hill, he allowed him to proceed at a walk.

Mr. Noakes also drew rein, and as his curiosity was strongly aroused, he took this opportunity of inquiring what was the motive for his sudden attack.

"The rascal recognised me," said Wild, "and was just about to seize me, so I flung the mug in his face, for that was the handiest weapon I had!"

This intelligence alarmed Mr. Noakes greatly, and he asked:

"Are you sure he recognised us?"

"Yes, I am sure I am not mistaken. It was the easiest matter in the world to read his countenance."

"You didn't kill him!" said Mr. Noakes, stammeringly.

"How do you know?"

"Because I heard him shriek and groan."

"Well, I wish I had—that's all!"

"So do I, for if he recovers, he will be filled with revenge, and will set the officers on our track."

"Make yourself easy about that," returned the thief-taker. "It will be some time at any rate before he is able to move about, even if he recovers at all, and by the time he can put the police officers on our track we shall be miles and miles away!"

"Where do you think you will be able to find a place of refuge, where the officers will not discover your retreat?"

"I can't answer that question, for I have really no idea. I shall have to trust entirely to circumstances."

"I feel very uneasy about that ostler," said Mr. Noakes, after a pause. "I should not wonder, now, if he does not manage to communicate with the officers."

"Wait till we get to the top of the hill," returned Wild. "We shall have to pause then to allow our horses to breathe a little, and from that elevation we shall be able to command a view of the road for miles, and if the officers are on our track, we cannot fail to see them."

They were already nearly three parts of the way up the hill, and Mr. Noakes could not resist turning his head round in order to look behind him.

Directly he did so, he uttered a shout:

"They are here," he said—"they are here—close behind us! Look!"

Jonathan turned round like lightning, and, to his dismay and surprise, saw, within a short distance of the foot of the hill, a large and well-mounted troop of police officers.

It was evident that the officers saw the fugitives, for something like a faint and indistinct shout reached Wild's ears, and all waved their arms, and incited their horses to increased speed.

Jonathan looked piercingly behind him, and as the day was clear, he was able to see with great distinctness.

Foremost in the throng of police officers was the ostler.

A bitter curse came from the lips of the thief-taker when he beheld him, and he wished most fervently from the bottom of his heart that he had hit him only just a little harder.

It was indeed the troop of police officers with the ostler at their head which had managed to get so close to the two fugitives.

It was mainly through the example which Joe, the ostler, set that the officers had performed the journey in such a short space of time, and when they once caught sight of the thief-taker and his companion, they were all eager in the extreme to press onward.

But not one of them could keep up with the ostler.

Mr. Noakes was in a terrible state of fright, and on this occasion made sure that nothing could save them from capture.

The officers were very close behind indeed, and had gained upon them in an incredible manner.

The Governor knew that his own horse and that of Wild's was knocked up, and the steepest portion of the hill yet lay before them.

How they were to escape he had no idea.

As for Jonathan, he did not seem to look upon their position in quite such a serious light.

"We must make our horses carry us safely out of this," he said—"that's our only chance! Don't spare yours, but keep up with me!"

The poor animals were dreadfully jaded, but the hard blows which they received seemed to infuse fresh vigour into their frames, and they went at a hard gallop up the hill.

Reaching the top, Wild saw stretching before him a long road, gradually sloping down.

It was a road upon which the utmost speed could be made; but then they would have no advantage over the officers, so that it really made little difference.

At a headlong rate, however, the two fugitives flew down the hill.

Joe, the ostler, was the first to reach the top, and he uttered a cry of anger and disappointment when he saw what a long way they were from him.

But the speed which the fugitives made in descending the hill was nothing in comparison to that made by Joe, the ostler.

He distanced the officers completely, who, while they urged their own cattle onward, looked after him with the greatest wonder.

Turning round, Jonathan saw that one of his pursuers was gaining rapidly upon him, but that caused very little uneasiness.

The ostler did not now even hold the halter to control his horse, but with a pistol in each hand rushed madly on.

Imagining himself to be near enough, he presently raised one of his pistols and fired.

No effect, that he could see, was produced by its discharge, except that his own horse was terrified at the sound and galloped more furiously than before.

He was gaining very rapidly upon them, and when only a few yards in their rear he raised his other pistol and fired again.

He fancied he heard a cry mingled with the explosion, but he was not quite sure, for just at that moment his horse, happening to entangle his feet in the rope belonging to the halter, stumbled and fell with a crash to the earth.

So suddenly did the horse fall that Joe had no chance of saving himself, and he was jerked from his seat with great violence.

He came down with full force upon his head on the hard roadway, and after a few convulsive struggles lay there either insensible or dead.

Jonathan laughed exultingly when he witnessed the catastrophe.

"We sha'n't be troubled with that fellow any longer!" he said. "On, Noakes—spur your horse hard!"

"I have got no spurs!" roared the Governor, almost failing to obtain breath enough to speak.

"Use your stick, then!" replied Wild. "Do anything so that you make greater speed!"

The horses were already going at full gallop, and it did not seem possible to make them go any faster.

Of course the officers were aware of the fate which had overtaken the ostler, for it had happened in full sight of them.

They seemed to be compelled by some irresistible instinct to slightly slacken their pace. It was a caution to them, and showed them the consequences which might result to any of them from such a furious rate of riding.

They did not pause, however, when they reached the spot where he had fallen, and as soon as they had passed they once more spurred their horses, for they saw that the fugitives were getting further and further off.

Jonathan Wild was not long in perceiving the advantage he had gained, and endeavoured to avail himself of it to the utmost.

The road stretched out before him as far as he could see.

His chances of getting away were therefore much diminished, and he was soon made alive to the fact that his only chance of escape lay in his succeeding in getting out of sight of his pursuers.

While he kept on the high-road this could not possibly be, for the officers would be able to discern him when nearly a mile distant.

Finding how much he had gained upon his pursuers, he determined to take the very first turn upon either his

right or left hand—it did not matter which, as they each led into the heart of the country.

About two hundred yards further on he perceived a long line of trees on his left hand, stretching out at right angles to the road.

This seemed to indicate the presence either of a lane or a cross-country road.

Mr. Noakes was not on a level with his companion, but yet he was very close indeed behind him, and Wild bawled out:

"You see those trees yonder? That's a lane. I am going to turn down it, so prepare!"

Having said this much, Wild troubled himself no further, and in a minute or two afterwards, coming to the place he had mentioned, he suddenly turned down it.

Mr. Noakes followed.

The fugitives were now out of sight of the police officers, and Jonathan Wild hastened along the lane with all the speed he could make, because he was anxious to avail himself of any other turning.

Fortune favoured him greatly, for ere he had gone more than a quarter of a mile he found another narrow lane branching off.

It was very zigzag, and this pleased Wild all the more, for the hedgerow on each side was of unusual height, and, even when his pursuers were comparatively close behind him, he would be out of their sight.

Hope now began to take very firm hold upon Wild's heart, for he imagined that the probability was he had already baffled his pursuers.

They had certainly seen him take the first turning, but not the second; and when they arrived at it, they would be in doubt as to whether he had kept straight on or not.

Wild founded his hope chiefly upon the contrariety of all human affairs. Like everyone else, he knew that there were but two ways of doing anything, important or unimportant, and equally certain that anyone in doubt or ignorance would choose the wrong in preference to the right way.

For all that, he did not relax his speed, although his horse several times shook beneath him, and seemed as though he would certainly fall to the earth.

He fully believed in the wisdom of getting as far away from his enemies as he possibly could.

Fancying that Noakes lagged behind somewhat, he cried:

"Courage—courage! We shall be able to number this among our many other escapes—we shall, depend upon it! Faster!—come on faster! Why do you lag behind?"

Turning half round in the saddle as he spoke, he was just in time to see his companion swaying backwards and forwards on his horse in a highly dangerous manner.

The Governor's face was absolutely colourless.

Wild pulled up a little as he cried:

"Hallo, there! What the devil is the matter with you? Why don't you sit up on your horse as you ought to?"

At the very same moment these words issued from his lips, the Governor gave a terrible lurch on one side, and fell with a crash to the ground.

His horse bounded forward, and would probably have escaped, only Jonathan was fortunate enough to catch hold of it by the bridle as it was galloping on.

Mr. Noakes lay upon the ground, just as he had fallen, in a very peculiar attitude, and he seemed to be quite bereft of animation.

This sudden downfall of his companion was quite inexplicable to Wild.

He could not imagine what was the cause of it.

He was very angry, too, and he thought once of galloping on, and leaving the Governor to shift for himself; but that intense dread of solitude which he had, made him pause, and resolve to ascertain what was the cause of his present condition.

It was no motive of compassion—no friendly feeling—no desire to be of the least service to his companion—that made Wild dismount from his steed, and, at the risk of losing the advantage he had gained with so much difficulty, stoop down over the prostrate form to ascertain the extent of the injuries received.

The motive was a purely selfish one, though mingled with it there was a certain amount of curiosity.

The Governor presented a perfectly lifeless appearance, and at the first glance Jonathan came to the conclusion that he was dead.

Such was not the case, however.

Turning him over, Wild found that the Governor's apparel was soaked in blood.

Hastily tearing it aside in order to find out where the wound was situated, he discovered a slight furrow in his left side.

It had evidently been produced by a bullet, and then Jonathan recollected the two shots which the ostler had fired.

He believed both had been ineffectual, but it was quite clear that one of them had wrought the mischief.

"What shall I do?" asked Wild of himself, as soon as he made this discovery. "I am almost certain he is not dead; that wound could not possibly be sufficient to cause death—it is only a superficial hurt. What shall I do with him? Leave him here, I suppose, and be off myself! It won't do for me to run any extra risk for the sake of such a contemptible wretch as this!"

A deep groan came from the Governor's lips, almost seeming like a reply to what Wild had said.

CHAPTER DXXVII.

JONATHAN WILD DETERMINES NOT TO DESERT HIS COMPANION IN CRIME.

It will be remembered that Joe, the ostler, fancied he heard a cry mingled with the report of his second pistol, and he was not mistaken.

That cry came from the lips of Mr. Noakes.

His first impression was that he had been shot, but as he felt no pain or inconvenience from the wound, and as he sat in the saddle without any difficulty, the Governor believed that this was an error.

He was much excited, and his blood was heated to an extraordinary degree by the great exertions he had been compelled to make, and this was how it was that he felt nothing of the wound in his side, from which the blood streamed in prodigious quantities.

It was in a great measure owing to the excessive flow of blood that he experienced no pain.

The rapid motion caused the blood to flow with more rapidity than it otherwise would have done, and at every step the Governor grew weaker and weaker, for the life was being drained out of his body.

Still, in some mechanical way, he retained his seat in the saddle.

In a vague, confused fashion, he was aware that his consciousness was leaving him.

There was a mist before his eyes, and he felt like one partially under the influence of a narcotic.

By mere instinct his horse had kept by the side of that one which Wild bestrode, and the turnings were taken without any guidance on the Governor's part.

He had almost relapsed into total insensibility when Wild shouted out to him.

The accents of that much-dreaded voice seemed to recall his failing faculties, though he could not wholly shake off the drowsy influence he felt.

At last, as we have seen, owing to his having lost such a quantity of blood, his bodily strength failed him utterly, and he tumbled headlong into the road.

Fortunately his feet did not get entangled in the stirrups—if they had, his injuries would have been more severe than they were.

Jonathan Wild found himself unable to decide what he should do with him. To linger, however, was only to court destruction.

A brief struggle took place in the thief-taker's mind as to whether he should leave the Governor or not; but eventually he made up his mind not to do so.

But he did not come to this resolution until after he had laid himself down in the road and pressed his ear close against the ground.

He listened attentively, and by this means satisfied himself that his pursuers were nowhere in the vicinity.

Springing to his feet, Jonathan Wild, by exercising the extraordinary strength which he possessed, lifted the body of his companion and placed it across his horse.

There was a broad belt round Mr. Noakes's waist, and by the aid of this the thief-taker strapped him to the saddle.

He lay across his horse very much as a sack of grain might have done.

Having done thus much, Jonathan Wild looked about

him, wondering where he should go and what he should do next.

A few yards further on he saw that the lane intersected a wood which appeared to be of considerable extent.

The idea that he might be able to conceal himself somewhere in its recesses at once occurred to him, and he bent his steps towards it without further hesitation.

The wood, preserve, or plantation, whichever it might be called, was bounded by a stout wooden paling more than six feet high, and Jonathan Wild was quite at a loss to know how this obstacle was to be surmounted.

When he saw this, however, it only made him more determined to penetrate into the wood by some means or other; so, leaving the lane, he made his way along one side of it, in the hope of being able to come to some place where it was not so high, or to a gate through which he could pass.

In this expectation he was, however, disappointed, and he kept going on and on for what seemed to him to be an intolerably long time, without being able to find what he sought.

Every moment he grew more and more apprehensive of being seen by the police officers.

As far as ever he could see, however, the palings were of one uniform height, and formed an unbroken line.

At last he stopped, for he could not see that it would be any advantage to proceed.

Stretching out his hand, he took hold of the top of the paling in order to ascertain its strength.

He found it much weaker than he had dared to anticipate, for some green parasitic moss which grew thickly over the wood-work had had the effect of rotting it to a very serious extent.

By a little strength and patience, Wild thought he should be able to pull down a portion of the fence large enough to allow the horses to pass through.

He tugged with right good will, and the rotten wood-work gave way before the pressure he applied to it.

In a few moments he had made a space large enough to answer his purpose, and although this success was unlooked for, he felt vexed rather than delighted, inasmuch as he regretted that he had not made the attempt before.

Leading the horses through the opening, his next care was to endeavour to repair the damage he had done by restoring the fence to its original condition, so that none would notice it having been pulled down except by a close examination.

This was a work of a little time, but it was time well spent.

When he had finished, Wild took hold of the bridles of the two horses, and led them at once into the thickest part of the wood.

At rare intervals, groans came from the throat of Mr. Noakes, but each one was fainter than its predecessor.

"He will certainly die from excessive loss of blood," said Wild, to himself, "unless I can find some means of checking it! Hush!—what's that?"

Wild stopped the horses, and listened intently.

The murmuring sound produced by the progress of some little stream now came clearly and sweetly upon his ears.

As soon as he had satisfied himself that water was close at hand, the thief-taker directed his course towards it.

After going rather more than fifty yards, he forced his way through a barrier of trees, and found himself upon the banks of one of the most beautiful woodland streams that could possibly be imagined.

The water was as clear as crystal, and meandered gracefully among the trees, making a pleasant plashing sound as it surmounted the various obstacles in its course.

Had not Wild been so brutalised as he was, and so dead to every ennobling feeling, he would have been charmed by the rare picturesque beauty of the scene.

So far, however, from dwelling upon it with delight, he merely saw, by glancing around, that he was surrounded by trees, and that there was water at his feet.

To him they were trees and water, and nothing more.

The horses were glad to halt on the banks of the stream, and as soon as ever Wild released his hold upon

the bridles, they both bent their heads, and commenced drinking eagerly.

Wild was parched and dry, and felt as though he would have liked a draught of something.

"If it was anything but water," he said, "I should be tempted."

With this remark, he unfastened the belt by which he had secured Noakes to the saddle, and allowed that unfortunate individual to slip to the ground.

He lay on the turf a huddled-up mass, apparently bereft of life.

The thief-taker, however, had not lived the strange life he had for so long without becoming acquainted with the nature of wounds, and, desperate as the condition of the Governor seemed, he did not doubt that he should be able to restore his vitality.

The bottom of the stream was composed of fine firm sand, and the depth of the water only between three and four inches.

As a speedy means of recovering his companion, he determined to lay him down at full length in the brook.

He did so, and it was not long before the restoring powers of the cold water made themselves manifest.

Mr. Noakes shuddered several times, and finally opened his eyes.

They had a dull, glassy look, and he fixed his gaze in a dreamy fashion upon the thief-taker's hideous countenance.

He closed them again almost instantly.

But Wild was satisfied.

"There's life in him yet," he muttered, "and if the officers will only let me alone for a little while, I shall be able to recover him."

With these words he stooped, and dragged his companion out of the stream.

He laid him down, however, close to the margin of the water, and then removing his clothing from the wound, he bathed it thoroughly, and bandaged it up afterwards in a very skilful manner.

He took off the long neckcloth which the Governor wore round his neck, and tore a square piece from one end of it.

This he thoroughly soaked in the water and folded over and over into many thicknesses, until it was of just such a size as would cover the wound made by the passage of the bullet.

Placing it thus, he fastened it into its position by tying the neckcloth round the Governor's body.

This done, he took some water up in his hands and poured it down upon the bandage, so as to make sure that it was thoroughly soaked.

The probability is, that if a surgeon had been called in he could not have rendered the wounded man any more effectual assistance.

Turning him over, Jonathan Wild sprinkled some water upon Mr. Noakes's face, and by this means once more restored him to his senses.

The Governor was rendered thoroughly helpless by the quantity of blood he had lost.

So prostrated was he that he had not the power to lift one of his hands.

With careful attention, it would be some time before he could recover from this desperate condition—certainly much longer would be required than the time during which Wild might count upon remaining undisturbed.

At any moment the officers might make their appearance, and if they once suspected their presence in the wood, they would not rest until they had thoroughly searched every square inch of it.

Therefore, although he had succeeded in restoring his companion to life so far, Jonathan felt the conviction steal over him that even now he should be obliged to leave him to his fate.

From the cause we have mentioned, he was extremely reluctant to do this, and, rising to his feet, he once more took a long look around him.

Nothing but trees met his gaze.

Then he glanced up towards the sky, in order to note the position of the sun.

"I'll push on through the wood," he said to himself at last. "It won't hurt Noakes to carry him on the horse in the same way as I brought him here. If I hear anything of the officers behind me, and I come to any place

that offers a chance for shelter, so much the better; if not, I cannot do wrong by emerging on the opposite side of the wood."

Having come to this determination, the thief-taker once more picked up the body of his companion and placed it with as much care as he possibly could upon the back of the horse.

He strapped him there just in the same manner as before, and he was careful to do this in such a manner that nothing could chafe that side of the body where the wound was situated.

As it would be inconvenient to mount his own steed and ride, in consequence of the many low-lying branches, sometimes extending in a horizontal direction from the trunks of the trees, the thief-taker proceeded on foot as before, leading the horses by the bridle.

Even in this way he had some difficulty in forcing a passage, but each step that he took inspired him with fresh hope, as he was unable to hear any sound indicative of the approach of his foes.

He began to believe that he had indeed been successful in entirely throwing them off the scent, and his self-congratulation grew greater accordingly.

By continually looking up at the sun, he was enabled to make his way through the trees in a tolerably straight line.

There was no fear that he would unconsciously double upon his course and emerge upon the same side of the wood as that he had entered, which might have been done by anyone less careful than himself.

There was a deep silence all around, and the wood bore an aspect of the greatest possible solitude, and Wild felt that if he was alone, and his companion was not with him, it would be positively unendurable.

He looked upon the insensible body of Mr. Noakes as company, though what consolation he could possibly derive from having him with him in this condition, is something we are unable to explain.

CHAPTER DXXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD UNEXPECTEDLY FINDS A PLACE OF REFUGE.

As he continued to pursue his way through the wood, Wild found the obstructions to his progress grow more and more numerous, until they threatened in a short time to become insurmountable.

That the vegetation should grow denser as he penetrated more into the centre of the wood was no more than might be expected, and presently Wild found himself confronted by such a wall of high prickly shrubs that he was compelled to halt.

It was madness to think of forcing his way through such a mass, but it was with the greatest reluctance that the thief-taker turned aside from his direct course.

He looked closely on his right hand, in the hope of being able to perceive some opening or glade, along which he might make his way, but this hope was completely frustrated.

Very much to his surprise, however, he noticed what looked like a rude footpath, which, though it did not seem to have been trodden much, had nevertheless had sufficient traffic over it to leave a distinct mark by which it could be traced.

It wound in and out among the trees for a considerable distance, but it did not appear to lead in the direction Wild wished to take.

Yet, when he saw it he came to a halt, and considered deeply for a few moments.

At last he determined to proceed along it, and ascertain to what place it led.

It might take a devious course, and by skirting the denser vegetation in the middle of the wood, take him out upon the opposite side.

To speak the truth, the open path was a great temptation to him, after having been compelled for so long to force his way through the branches and underwood.

As he proceeded he found the traces of the footpath grow less and less distinct; in some places they would be scarcely discernible, and in others the path, though narrow, would be well defined.

It wound in and out in a very tortuous manner, but in spite of this Jonathan made much better progress than he had hitherto been able.

Suddenly his attention was attracted by a thin wreath of whitish smoke, which ascended in an almost perpendicular direction, for there was no wind.

At the sight of the smoke Jonathan stopped again, for he knew it betokened the presence of human beings.

From what source the smoke proceeded, whether from a cottage or whether from a fire lighted on the ground, he had no means of ascertaining, for the trees hid all objects from his view.

Certainly, his most prudent course appeared to be to strike off in another direction, and not to venture to approach this fire and the human beings who were in all probability near it; and at first this was what the thief-taker determined to do.

A second thought, however, caused him to change his intention.

He could not help suspecting the smoke he beheld came from the chimney of some woodman's hut, or it might be a keeper's, and if so there was a possibility that he should be able, by offering them a liberal reward, to obtain rest and shelter beneath its roof.

Mr. Noakes would stand a better chance of having his wounds attended to, and by this time, as he had heard nothing of his pursuers, Jonathan came to the conclusion that they had altogether lost the track.

He resolved to push forward with the utmost circumspection, and if things looked favourable, then he would endeavour to carry out his intention.

With this view he walked on at a slower rate than before, and by making the horses walk upon the soft grass at each side of the footpath his approach was almost inaudible.

At last, peeping through some trees, he saw before him a rude building, to which no other designation save that of "hut" could be applied.

Its walls and roof were composed of rough wooden planks, some of which seemed like the fragments of an old boat, but the whole was plastered over with clay, which the continual action of the sun had converted into a substance almost as hard as stone.

This singular dwelling had but one little chimney, and it was from this that the wreath of white smoke ascended.

Wild was surprised not only at the general appearance of the building, but at its strange situation.

He did not for a moment believe that it was the residence of any keeper, and he wondered greatly what human beings they could be who had chosen such a spot for their abode.

He listened, but could hear no sound, and had it not been for the smoke he would have come to the conclusion that the hut was untenanted.

If some one was not actually within at the present moment, they could not have been long absent, for from the condition of the smoke Jonathan came to the conclusion that fresh fuel had recently been placed upon the fire.

A kind of struggle went on in Wild's mind as he continued to gaze upon this cottage.

For the life of him he could not make up his mind whether it would be best for him to push on or try to take up his quarters there.

He was strongly tempted to the latter, for he was terribly fatigued; and who can wonder at it, considering the number of hours he had sat in the saddle without intermission?

He was so stiff as scarcely to be able to move his lower limbs; and after a few minutes' more deliberation he walked boldly up to the door of the hut and kicked it with his heavy boots.

No notice whatever was taken of the summons, and Wild, who did not feel inclined to wait long, repeated his assault with additional vigour.

Then he stopped, and listening, he fancied he could hear a scuffling noise going on inside.

His curiosity was greatly roused by this circumstance, and he kicked again.

Then the door was opened, and a little, shrivelled old man, whose hair would have been white but for the coating of dirt there was upon it, made his appearance.

He seemed to be trembling, as though from the effects of extreme fear.

"I am sorry to disturb you, old gentleman," said Wild

"but if you feel inclined you may be able to earn more money during the next few hours than you could if you were to work hard for a whole twelvemonth!"

The old man's countenance lighted up with a strange, sinister grin, as he said:

"What do you want?"

"I want shelter," said Wild, "and assistance for my companion, who has been wounded, and I fear is at the point of death."

The old man shook his head.

"I can't accommodate you," he replied.

As he spoke, he made an attempt to close the door, but Wild effectually frustrated it by placing his foot against the door-post.

"Consider," he said, in a tone and gesture that seemed to awe the old man; "I am not one to be lightly put off! I tell you, if you will find me shelter I will pay you for it!"

"It is impossible," said the old man—"impossible!"

"Not at all! We can none of us tell what we can do till we try! Stand aside! You see it's possible, after all!"

While he was speaking, Wild suddenly pushed the door open with his shoulder, and led the two horses inside.

"Shut the door!" he cried, in a commanding voice—"shut the door, and then listen to what I have to say!"

Tremblingly the old man obeyed.

Jonathan looked about him with considerable curiosity.

The interior of the hut was much larger than he had imagined it could be, judging from the appearance of the outside.

In a primitive kind of fireplace a few faggots were burning, and as he gazed upon them, the idea occurred to him that they were insufficient to cause the amount of smoke which he had seen.

Trifling as this was, it was strange, and the conviction came over Wild's mind that there was some mystery about the place that he could probably unravel.

The floor appeared to be composed of a number of old planks, simply laid upon the ground without any attempt at order or regularity.

They were loose, and moved slightly when they were trodden upon.

After he had closed the door, the old man made an attempt to speak, but Jonathan would not listen to what he had to say.

"Hark you!" cried the thief-taker, in an imperious voice, "we may as well come to an understanding in a few words as not! I have been pursued for many miles by a party of police officers, and my companion, as you see, has been wounded, I fear, to the death. With a great deal of trouble, I have succeeded in throwing my enemies off the scent. I have now eluded them entirely. Chance brought me to this place. All I want you to do is to allow us to remain here for a short time, so that I may attend to my comrade's hurts."

"I can't—I can't!"

"For what reason?" asked Wild, as he glanced around. "There is no one here! We have the place all to ourselves, have we not?"

"Y—yes!" replied the old man, stammeringly.

"Very well, then! You don't seem to be in very flourishing circumstances. Look—here are a couple of guineas! You shall have eight more, provided you do as I require."

The old man took the coins, and glanced at them inquisitively.

The promise of so large a sum had produced a palpable effect.

"You say you have been pursued by police officers?" he said, as he consigned the coins to his pocket.

"Yes."

"Well, they are no friends of mine, and never have been. Be candid, and tell me what it is that you have done for them to be after you."

"You are asking too much. I have done more than most men dream of; but never mind that! I have escaped the triple tree at Tyburn by a hair's-breadth, and every effort is being made to recapture me!"

"Who are you, then?"

"As you don't know, I shall not think of giving you that information."

"And your companion?"

"His situation is precisely the same as my own."

"It's almost more than my life is worth to have admitted you into this place; but you are here, and if I only knew one thing——"

"What?"

"If you were a member of the family all would be well, and I would pour out my blood to the last drop in saving you from the grabs."

Wild listened to these words with the greatest astonishment.

He knew perfectly well what the old man meant by the word "family."

It signified the whole of that class who obtain a livelihood by preying upon society.

The idea of finding any member of the fraternity of thieves in this out-of-the-way place astonished the thief-taker exceedingly.

But his astonishment did not last more than a second.

"The family!" he said. "Do you mean to say that you are a member of it? If so, you must recognise the sign."

Wild made a curious sign with his hand upon his breast.

It was a means by which members of the family, though strangers, could recognise each other.

That Wild should be acquainted with this secret sign is no more than might be expected, for during his long and infamous career he was the companion of thieves of every class.

The old man showed not only that he recognised the sign, but that he was himself a member of the family, by giving the countersign.

"I see I have found a friend," cried the thief-taker. "Well, I am glad of it!"

"You have. You can please yourself whether you tell me who you are and what you have done. At any rate, the grabs are after you—that is enough!"

"Then we will attend to my wounded friend," said Jonathan.

"Yes; but first of all, are you perfectly sure that you have thrown the police officers off the scent?"

"I judge so, because I have not heard anything of them for some time before I entered the wood."

"They may have lost the track for a time, then, and perchance may recover it."

"There's just a chance that they may do so."

"Well, it doesn't matter; for, if they were to come to the door at this very moment, I could conceal you where you would never be found."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the thief-taker, glancing around him, and being unable to discover any signs of a hiding-place.

"It is perfectly true," replied the old man; "and if you have any doubts upon the matter, I will hide you at once."

"No—no! For the present I believe I am perfectly safe. We shall hear something of the officers before they arrive."

"So we shall. I shall be able to give you timely warning of their approach."

"Well, now then to see to my wounded friend!" said Wild, as he proceeded to unstrap him from the saddle.

The old man came forward to lend his assistance, and when the belt had been removed, the Governor was laid down at full length in front of the fire.

So skilfully had the bandage been tied that it had not been shifted from its position in the least, but it was no longer cold and wet.

"Have you any water?" asked Wild.

"Yes."

"Bring it here, then!"

The old man fetched a pitcher of water from one corner of the hut, and Wild poured the greatest portion of its contents on to the bandage, so that it was once more thoroughly soaked.

This process would at the same time prevent inflammation, and cause the wound to heal.

"The wound is little more than skin deep," said Wild, "though it has bled profusely. That is what has brought him to this stage of weakness. Have you any wine or brandy in the place?"

"No; but I have gin."

"That will do, then," said Wild. "Fetch some at once."

"I will, but first of all I must take a peep outside, in

order to make sure that the officers are not about. They may have tracked you."

Jonathan offered no opposition to the old man doing as he proposed.

He fully expected that he would have gone to the door and opened it; but in this he was mistaken.

CHAPTER DXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS THE OFFICERS ARE NOT SO EASILY DECEIVED AS HE IMAGINED.

GOING to that part of the hut which was opposite the fireplace, the old man raised his arm above his head and took hold of a piece of iron that had been fixed against the wall.

He took hold of another similar projection with his other hand, and placed his foot upon one that was about two feet from the ground.

Then looking up, Wild saw that there were a number of these projections in the wall, but owing to their being of the same colour, and being plastered over with clay like the woodwork, they would escape any but the closest observation.

By the aid of these the old man ascended to the roof of the hut with an agility that was most remarkable considering his extreme age.

The hut was not very high, so he soon reached the top. Holding by one hand, he, with the other, removed a small plank forming part of the roof.

Then, thrusting his head through the aperture, he took a hasty and inquisitive look around.

He drew in his head with a suddenness that made Wild think there was something amiss.

Hastily putting the board into its former position, he made his way down to the floor again as though he was quite reckless of personal consequences.

"You made a mistake," he said. "You have not thrown the officers off the scent—on the contrary, they have tracked you to this spot. They are close at hand!"

"Impossible!"

"Impossible or not, I saw them just outside," returned the old man. "They are evidently coming, and if you are not quick, I shall not be able to place you where I intended."

"I can scarcely believe it," replied Wild; "but if the officers really are here, lose no time in concealing us. But what shall you do with our horses?"

"Leave them to me," returned the old man. "I can hide your horses as well as yourself and companion. Swear, however, never to disclose what you see!"

"Willingly," said Wild—"it will never be to my advantage to tell tales."

"That is sufficient, then. Now be quick!"

When the old man had closed the door after Wild's entrance he had placed across it a wooden bar, by which it was habitually secured, so that there was no fear of the officers being able to effect a sudden entrance.

Jonathan could scarcely bring himself to believe that he had really failed to throw his foes off his track.

"Some chance circumstance," he muttered, "must have directed them. I am sure it can be nothing more!"

Then, in a louder voice, he added, addressing the singular old man:

"How far off are they?"

"Close by!"

"Are you sure they are coming here?"

"Yes!"

"Be quick, then!"

"I will!"

Wild had the greatest possible amount of confidence in the old man's ability to hide him.

He was sure that he was a member of the family.

But Jonathan was not.

He was at war with most of them.

A fresh thought now occurred to him, and caused him to feel no slight amount of uneasiness.

The old man, being under the impression that Wild was of the family, was willing to afford him every protection; and providing that he (Wild) could preserve his identity a secret, all would be well.

But how was this to be done?

The officers outside would at once proclaim him, and then Wild doubted not that the old man would change from a friend to an enemy.

He would betray him without hesitation.

Wild set his teeth hard as he made this reflection.

It was a new danger, and one which he had omitted to take into consideration.

It was with the rapidity and suddenness of the lightning's flash.

In the meanwhile the old man, with surprising nimbleness, set about making his preparations to conceal the two men and their horses.

We have said that the floor of the hut was composed of a number of rude, time-worn planks, which had the appearance of having been merely placed upon the earth.

Such was the case.

It was really wonderful to see the expedition with which the old man pulled up a number of these loose planks.

A huge cavity in the earth was then disclosed.

"Haste—haste!" he cried, addressing Wild. "Pick up your comrade and carry him down here—I will lead the horses! Be quick, or we shall be too late; and it is not only your presence here that will be discovered, but something else of infinitely greater importance!"

"Look here!" said Wild, thrusting both hands into his pockets and pulling them out with as much gold in them as he could grasp—"look here! Take these!"

The old man's eyes glittered with a strange light as he held his pocket open to receive the coins.

"You receive those," cried Wild, "to keep my presence here a secret, and as a reward not to betray me to my foes! Never mind who they say I am! Take the money, and let that content you!"

"All right! I swear I will keep your presence here a secret! Down with you!"

Tolerably well satisfied that he was safe, the thief-taker picked up his companion, as he had been bidden, and staggered towards the opening in the floor.

Just as he reached the brink of it there came a succession of bangs upon the door.

The old man's countenance became expressive of the utmost alarm, and he again implored Wild to be quick.

The thief-taker darted down.

He found that the earth sloped downwards somewhat precipitously.

There were no signs of any steps.

The old man took hold of the horses and forced them to descend.

Then, as soon as they were low enough to enable him to close the opening, he began to place the planks in their former position.

He left Wild to look after his own safety, to attend to his wounded companion, and to look after the horses as well.

Never in his life, probably, had the old man replaced the planks so speedily.

Indeed it was marvellous to behold him.

All the while he was thus engaged, the officers were pounding away upon the door.

At length the floor of the hut was restored to its ordinary condition.

To have looked at it no one would have dreamed that it had been so recently disturbed, or have suspected the existence of the deep, cavernous place.

As soon as ever he could, the old man went to the door, and, placing his mouth close to it, said, in shrill, piping accents:

"Who is there? Who is it that knocks so loud? What is it you want?"

"So you have woken up at last, have you?" said a voice from without.

"Who are you?"

"Officers of police; and I call upon you, in the sacred name of his most gracious Majesty the King, to open this door and allow us to enter! We are armed with a proper search-warrant!"

"Indeed, Mr. Officers, you shall come in! I am unfastening the door! You shall come in directly."

The old man removed the bar, and then the door was rather roughly thrust open by the officers.

"Why did you not open the door when we first



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES IN THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE.]

knocked?" asked the chief officer, glancing suspiciously around him.

"You frightened me almost to death, good sir!"

"Then you have been doing wrong."

"How so, sir?"

"Or you would not be frightened."

"But, good sir, I am old and timid, and when you knocked so suddenly and loudly, I did not know for a minute where I was."

"I don't see why you should be frightened."

"I thought you were robbers, or something of that sort—I did indeed, good sir;—but what did you please to want?"

The old man looked at least twenty years older than he did a few minutes before.

No one could have believed, judging from the appearance of his bent and aged frame, that he had the strength or power to move a straw.

No. 112.—BLUESKIN.

The officers looked all about the cottage.

"Have you seen anyone about here lately?"

"No, good sir, I have not."

"Are you sure? You had better speak if you know anything. If you can give us any information about two men, you will be well rewarded."

"What two men are they, sir?"

"One is Jonathan Wild."

"Who?" asked the old man, drawing himself up to his full height, and speaking in a tone that made the place ring again—"who?"

"Jonathan Wild."

"The thief-taker?"

"Yes."

The old man clasped his hands together, and bending down, at once assumed his former aspect.

The officer looked keenly upon him.

"Why did you change like that?"

"Change?"

"Yes; you seemed to throw off your age at once."

The old man was silent.

"Was it the name of Jonathan Wild that produced such an effect upon you?"

"It was."

"Why?"

"I could not help it."

"Do you know him?"

The old man uttered a groan as he said:

"Heaven help me!"

"Speak out—your conduct is suspicious!"

"No, no;—but—Jonathan Wild——"

"What of him?"

"He is the bitterest foe I have on earth!"

"Indeed!"

"And in truth, good sir! He has made me the miserable thing you see! Shall I tell you my tale? It is long, but when you have heard it you will not wonder at my drawing myself up in the way I did, and speaking with so much more force."

"You need not tell your tale; but, if Jonathan Wild is your bitter foe, you have now an excellent chance of having your revenge."

"How—how?"

"He is now hunted for his life! He has been tried and condemned to death, but he escaped. I suppose, though, that you know all this?"

"No, sir—no, sir; and it is so strange that I can hardly bring myself to believe it."

"It is true, every word of it. He has with him, for his companion, Mr. Noakes, the late Governor of Newgate."

"Is it possible?"

"It is perfectly true."

"You amaze me beyond measure!"

"We have traced them to this wood."

"This wood?"

"Yes—and to the vicinity of this hut. We should not have found you out else."

"And is Wild wounded?"

"No—his companion. If you have seen anything of two men answering to the description I have given, tell me all you know about them. You shall be well rewarded, never fear. Have you seen anything of them?"

The old man shook his head.

"I have not seen them," he said.

"I believe you speak the truth."

"I do indeed, good sir!"

"Well, we must look elsewhere for our men. If, after this, you should happen to come across them, follow on their track, and don't lose sight of them on any account."

"You may depend I shall do that."

"You say Wild is your foe?"

"My bitter, lifelong foe!"

"Then by bringing him to justice you will have a full revenge upon him, for when he once again gets into the hands of the law, I will guarantee he does not escape, but will soon perish on Tyburn Tree."

The old man rubbed his hands together, and looked quite delighted.

"I will keep a sharp look-out," he said, "and if I am lucky enough to catch sight of him, I will follow in his footsteps like a bloodhound."

The chief officer gave one more glance around him, and then prepared to depart.

"I have but poor accommodation to offer you in this humble hut," said the old man, "but what there is you are welcome to. Would you like to stay a little while and rest yourselves?"

"No, no," replied the chief officer; "we must attend to our work first; we must not rest until the two villains are securely made prisoners."

"As you will."

"Bear in mind all that I have said. If you know Jonathan Wild, you must not expect him to look as he did when you saw him last; he is wonderfully altered."

After thus speaking, the officer and his men took their departure from the hut, in order to pursue their researches.

The singular old man stood upon the door-step of his crazy habitation, and watched them until they were out of sight.

When they had all disappeared among the trees, he turned round and closed the door behind him.

Once more he put up the heavy wooden bar.

Having done this, he did not venture to proceed to Wild's hiding-place, but climbed up to the roof of the hut by means of the ingenious contrivance we have described.

Very cautiously he pushed aside the plank that did duty for a trap-door, and, thrusting his head through the aperture, took a long and steady look about him.

From the elevated position he now occupied, he was able to catch sight of the officers as they wound their way in and out among the trees, and he smiled oddly when he saw what pains they took to search closely the tangled underwood, so as to make sure that those they sought were not concealed beneath it.

At last their forms quite disappeared in the distance, and as soon as the old man had satisfied himself that they were not within half a mile at the least, he descended from his post of elevation.

Going to that part of the floor from which he had lifted the boards, he listened.

Hearing nothing, however, from below, he slowly and cautiously again removed the planks, and commenced a descent into that subterranean region the mouth of which they formed a covering to.

CHAPTER DXXX.

MR. NOAKES RECOVERS HIS SENSES, AND JONATHAN WILD MAKES SOME EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERIES.

It is now time that we took a glance at Jonathan's own proceedings.

He found that the ground beneath his feet shelved gently downwards; and carrying the body of Mr. Noakes in the best way he could, he groped his way through the intense darkness.

Suddenly, however, the sound of voices reached his ears, and he paused.

Evidently these sounds came from above, and the desire took strong possession of him to creep back to the spot from which he had started, and listen to what was going on.

He listened again, and heard the voices more plainly than before.

Stooping down, he placed the body of his still insensible companion on the ground.

Terrified by the darkness, he had no difficulty in inducing the horses to remain perfectly still; and when he had done this, the thief-taker, with the stealthy step of a tiger, made his way to the floor of the hut.

When very close to it, he stopped.

The conversation that was going forward was that which we have already placed in full before the reader.

Can anyone imagine what was the state of Wild's feelings when he heard the tone of the old man's voice change so suddenly, and when he afterwards heard him declare that he (Wild) was his deadly foe?

Jonathan set his teeth hard, and prepared to resign himself to his fate.

He quite gave himself up for lost. There was no avenue by which he could escape, and after such a declaration as the old man had made it was tolerably certain that he would disclose the secret of the cleverly-construted hiding-place.

To the thief-taker's unutterable astonishment and relief, this was not done, and then he set to work to rack his brains in order to find out why it was that the old man declared he had seen nothing of the fugitives.

Had Wild known the purpose for which that hiding-place had been contrived, or could he but have guessed to what place it led, his surprise would have instantly disappeared.

But the fact was, it was more than the old man's life was worth to make the officers acquainted with the secret opening in the floor.

It was not solely his own secret, but that of others, whose safety, it may be fairly said, entirely depended upon it.

Therefore, had his desire to surrender Wild to the officers been a thousand times greater than it was, he could not, and dared not, have yielded to it.

All this the thief-taker was profoundly ignorant of, and as he continued to feel very doubtful whether

his hiding-place would escape a search, provided the officers made one, he came to the conclusion that the very best thing he could do was to explore the recesses of that subterraneous place.

It might be that he would be able to find some mode of exit by which he could gain the open air, and, inspired by this hope, he turned round, and, with the same secrecy and caution as before, crept downwards to the spot where his companion lay.

Ere he had gone many yards, a faint groan struck upon his ears.

It came from the Governor's lips, no doubt, and was the first symptom of returning consciousness.

Fearful that the sound might be heard by those above, Jonathan hastened forward.

As the subterraneous passage was profoundly dark, of course he could not see whereabouts Mr. Noakes lay.

But he was guided to it not only by the faint moans which he gave utterance to with but little intermission, but by the recollection he had of the precise spot upon which he had deposited him.

Reaching him at last, Wild stooped down and took hold of his hand.

"Hush—hush!" he said. "If you are well enough to understand anything, obey this injunction! Officers are within a few yards of us, and we have had another hair-breadth escape. We are cunningly concealed, and, provided we make no noise, there is little fear that we shall be discovered."

After this, Mr. Noakes could not have been more silent had he been dead.

How to carry out his original purpose—namely, that of exploring the cavernous place—Wild scarcely knew.

To leave Noakes where he was might be full of danger. A sudden accession of pain might cause him to forget his caution and utter a groan.

Of course, if the officers heard any such sound, their suspicions would be awakened instantly.

Yet, to take his insensible companion with him was quite impossible.

Mr. Noakes could not walk, and Wild was not equal to the task of carrying him.

But his dreadful impatience would not allow him to remain still; so, sinking his voice to a whisper, he said:

"Noakes—Noakes,—can you hear what I say? Are you better?"

"No better! I feel I have received my death-wound!"

"Pho—pho! Your case is not so bad as that! I will give you my word for that, for I have dressed your wound myself. You will get better in a very little while. You are suffering from nothing but loss of blood."

"I feel as though I was already in my grave," was the dejected reply.

"You can smell the earth," Wild replied, "for we happen to be in an underground place; but it is not a grave, for all that. Do you think you could manage to get up and walk a little way by my assistance?"

"No, no—I could not! It would be impossible!"

"Nay, make the effort!"

"I would rather not! Leave me here—let me die in peace! Seek your own safety in what way you will."

"You fully understand all that I am saying, Noakes—do you not?"

"Perfectly well."

"Then I will tell you what I will do."

"What?"

"If you will promise me to remain here, and make no attempt either to move or to speak—if you feel that you have sufficient control over yourself to subdue a groan should you be attacked by a sudden pain,—I will endeavour to find a way out of this gloomy place."

"It is gloomy and dark too."

"Very dark! We are fairly beneath the surface of the earth. There is no clink or creak through which light can penetrate. This is absolute darkness."

"It is."

"But can you promise me—may I rest confident that during my brief absence you will remain totally silent?"

"You may; no sound louder than a breath shall come from me."

"That will do, then. If you breathe only, you need not fear being heard."

"How long shall you be away?"

"Probably not more than two minutes—perhaps ten. Unluckily, we have not the means of procuring a light. If we had, I would at all risks endeavour to find out what kind of a looking place this is."

"But that will not matter."

"No, not much. I will creep onward, guided by my sense of touch, and when I have made a discovery I will instantly return."

As a matter of course, this conversation between the thief-taker and his companion was carried on in the faintest possible whisper.

He spoke hastily, so that the delay amounted at most to a few seconds only.

Having thus, as he imagined, made matters quite right with his companion in crime, Jonathan Wild, stooping down upon his hands and knees, began to crawl cautiously along the passage, for such he imagined it to be, though he could not make sure of it.

He groped his way onward for some distance, when all at once his hand came in contact with something soft.

Upon touching this object, whatever it was, his first impulse was to shrink back.

Recovering himself, however, and with a smile upon his lips at what he termed his own weakness, the thief-taker proceeded to ascertain what was the nature of the obstacle.

Feeling over it with both hands, he at length came to the conclusion that it was a large, heavy curtain, formed of some peculiar material, but what kind he could not recognise by his touch alone.

It is possible that he might have been at fault had he been furnished with a light.

At any rate, this curtain was very thick and very heavy, and well calculated to deaden all sounds.

Wondering for what purpose it had been placed there, and feeling more convinced than ever that he was upon the brink of making some discoveries of an extraordinary and mysterious description, Wild raised the curtain a sufficient height from the floor to enable him to crawl underneath it to the space beyond.

Then he fancied that he could hear a peculiar clanking, hammering sound, as though some species of manufacture was being carried on at no great distance.

This, however, was so unlikely to be the case, that he discarded the idea at once.

He crept onward for about a couple of yards and then stopped, for the sound which had before attracted his attention became more and more unequivocal.

"What is it?" he muttered to himself, after listening intently. "Some manufacturing process is going on—I am sure of that—in my youth I have heard similar sounds often enough. What can it be?"

He listened again, and while he was doing so a fresh thought occurred to him.

"I'd forgotten, in all this whirl of events, the circumstance of the quantity of smoke that I saw escaping from the chimney, and which first led me to the hut; no doubt it is from some underground apartment, close to the entrance of which I unquestionably am. The smoke that ascended from it did not come from that paltry fire on the hearth, that is quite certain."

Had Jonathan Wild's mind been in a less agitated condition than it was, the probability is that he would have had some suspicion as to the nature of the discovery he was about to make.

But he was not, as may be easily imagined, in exactly the state of mind that was calculated to assist him in coming to an accurate conclusion.

Continuing to grope his way onward, he presently found his further progress barred by an obstacle which he quickly made out to be a strong wooden door.

Slowly he rose to his feet, and was in the act of considering within his own mind whether he should make any attempt to pass through this door, when his speculations were put an end to in a summary fashion.

Suddenly some one from within flung the door open, and such a glare of light came from within, that at first, having come out of such profound darkness, Jonathan Wild was not able to see anything.

But he heard a roar of surprise and ejaculations from many lips.

Fortunately the thief-taker's presence of mind did not desert him, and, remembering the sign which the old man had made, he repeated it

Then some one seized him by the coat and dragged him forcibly forward, and a voice cried:

"Who are you? What's your business here? Speak—speak at once! Say at once who you are!"

Jonathan Wild gave a glance around him.

It was a hasty, hurried one, and occupied only a fraction of time; nevertheless, he saw a very great deal, and he was enabled by it to understand everything.

The scene was a very strange one, and we will endeavour to convey an idea of the place to the reader's mind by means of a description, but we shall not be able to do this with the same rapidity that Jonathan Wild took his one comprehensive glance.

CHAPTER DXXXI.

JONATHAN WILD SUCCEEDS IN HOODWINKING THE COINERS.

It was a large, irregularly-shaped underground apartment, if such a word can be applied to a place of this description.

The roof varied in height, and was composed of nothing but earth, which was held up by means of numerous planks that in their turn were supported on upright posts planted firmly in the floor.

The walls, too, were nothing but earth, and so was the floor, which, nevertheless, was hard and solid underfoot, having either been hammered hard or else worn by continually being trodden upon.

The consequence was that the whole place wore an inconceivably cheerless aspect, which would have been a thousand times more manifest except for a glowing furnace, which was situated in the centre, and from which there came a brilliant glare of light, that was, however, tinged with a red hue.

This light, falling on the rough walls and upon the supporting timbers, imparted a picturesque effect.

This was the light which had so dazzled Wild's eyes when it first fell upon them.

In this underground chamber four men and one woman were assembled.

In the furnace was a large crucible, filled nearly to the brim with molten metal, while, scattered round about, were numerous moulds of singular shape, and on a rude kind of table or bench, the only article of furniture visible, was a heap of glittering coins.

All this Wild saw at a glance, and he comprehended immediately that he had come across a nest of coiners.

That such was the occupation of the people in the cavern there was abundant proof.

When the man who opened the door first caught sight of a stranger standing on the threshold, he uttered a shout of astonishment.

The cry was quickly echoed by the others, and, beyond all doubt, the thief-taker would have been dealt with in a very summary manner had he not been fortunate enough to remember the signal the old man had given.

The coiners then understood that this stranger had not discovered their secret, and crept into the passage in a surreptitious manner, with the intention of betraying them.

On the contrary, they saw that he was one of the initiated, as the signal fully proved, and they were only anxious to know who he was, and to learn the circumstances that had brought him there.

With one reservation, Jonathan told them the precise truth.

He said that he and his companion had been hunted by the police officers—that with great difficulty they had thrown them off the scent, that they had entered the wood and discovered the hut, and he had sought within it shelter for himself and succour for his wounded comrade.

He explained how, upon showing the old man that he was a member of the family, he concealed him beneath the planks when the officers drew near, and how he had left his wounded comrade in the passage, and had crept forward until he reached the door.

This, and all other particulars, he made them acquainted with, reserving only the secret of his own identity.

It was highly necessary, for his own safety, that this secret should be preserved.

If they once knew who he was, they would be ready to tear him limb from limb.

The reader will doubtless remember what a violent crusade Jonathan Wild instituted, some time back, against coiners, and how he had been the means of dispersing the most formidable gang of these wretches that had ever been known.

There was some hope that he derived from the circumstance that none of those present recognised him.

This might be because they had never seen him before, or it might be owing to the extraordinary alteration which had taken place in the thief-taker's outward appearance.

How he was to get over the difficulty which would arise when the old man made his appearance, he could not very well see, for he stopped listening long enough, as we are aware, to hear the chief officer say that it was Jonathan Wild of whom they were in search.

"The old man above," said Wild, addressing the strange beings by whom he was surrounded, "promised me and my wounded companion safe shelter from our enemies."

"Where is this wounded companion of yours?" asked one of the coiners.

"You will find him some distance off in the passage, and near him are our two horses."

One of the men at once set off with the view of ascertaining how far the statement was correct.

Strangely enough, just as he passed out of the doorway leading into the passage from the underground chamber, the old man, having satisfied himself that the officers were not likely to return, lifted the planks and began to make the descent.

As the body of Mr. Noakes lay about half-way between these two places, the two men met close to the body.

Mr. Noakes was half conscious of what was going on around him, and although he strongly objected to the proceeding, yet he was powerless to offer any resistance when these two men picked him up, one by the head and the other by the heels, and carried him swiftly along.

The prominent idea in the wretched Governor's muddled mind was that they were police officers, and he groaned most dismally.

The coiners placed the wounded man on the floor, and by the strong light there was in the place they found that in this particular, at least, the new comer had not deceived them.

Jonathan bent a scrutinising glance upon the countenance of the old man, and he noted with alarm the angry look there was about his eyes.

The moment of peril was now at hand, and Jonathan strove to nerve himself for it as best he could.

"You look to me, no doubt," said the old man, addressing his companions, "for some explanation regarding the presence of these two men. I will give you a truthful account of all. A piece of information has since come to my knowledge, however, which, had I but possessed a short time before, would have entirely altered the aspect of affairs, for on no consideration would I have held out a helping hand to that man!"

He pointed to Jonathan Wild as he spoke.

"Why—why?" asked the others, eagerly.

"Because," replied the old man, with angry energy—"because he is my mortal enemy, and yours as well!"

It was with great misgivings that the thief-taker noticed how, as if actuated by a common instinct, the coiners suddenly plunged their hands into the breasts of their apparel, as though in search of some concealed weapon, as soon as the old man spoke thus.

"Who is he?" they asked, fiercely.

"Jonathan Wild!" screamed the old man, at the very top of his lungs.

Jonathan Wild, of course, had fully expected this announcement; but, what was more, he had decided in his own mind as to just what he should do.

As soon as the denunciation had been uttered, the coiners all rushed forward; but they failed to surround their foe, for Jonathan Wild, almost before the words had left the old man's lips, had given a sudden bound forward, and with one leap stood upright on the table.

At the same time he drew his sword, and waved it

round him with such rapidity and determination that the coiners shrank back appalled.

"Shoot—him!" screamed the old man—"down with him!—murder him!—kill him!—don't let the villain live!"

"Stand back!" thundered Wild, in a voice that immediately commanded the attention of all present. "Hear, first, the few words I am about to say; don't be guided only by that old man yonder, who labours under a mistake!"

The coiners seemed inclined to attend to this demand, and as they were silent, Jonathan Wild took the opportunity to continue:

"The fact is that I and my companion have been made the victims of a mistake—I repeat, a mistake! Do you understand what I mean?"

The coiners muttered some words in a dissatisfied tone by way of reply.

"We have been pursued by the officers," continued the thief-taker, "under the supposition that we were two different persons, namely, Jonathan Wild and the Governor of Newgate, or I should say the late Governor of Newgate. The officers have told the old man this, and he has believed it; but it is entirely incorrect, though that we are both members of the family I can prove to your satisfaction."

The men did not seem very well pleased with this explanation, and continued to mutter threateningly.

Wild went on:

"The point can easily be settled!" he said. "Who is there here that has seen Jonathan Wild?"

There was no reply, and Wild felt his hopes were beginning to rise.

"Have you ever seen Jonathan Wild?" he repeated, addressing himself more particularly to the old man.

"I have," was the reply.

Jonathan Wild had not expected this, and he felt that a time was coming when he would have to call more nerve into exercise than ever.

"Come forward, then!" said one of the coiners—"come forward, Lawson, and have a good look at him! Tell us whether this is Jonathan Wild, and mind you make no mistake!"

Now came the critical moment.

Wild hoped to pass through the ordeal in safety, because no one was better aware than himself how greatly he was changed.

He added increased effect to this alteration by screwing up his countenance in a peculiar manner.

As though he was exceedingly anxious to have the disputed identity settled, Jonathan Wild turned his face towards the light.

The old man came forward, and, shading his eyes with both hands, looked at him attentively.

"Is that Jonathan Wild?" asked one of the coiners presently.

"I—!"

"You see he hesitates," cried Wild in a triumphant voice, not allowing the old man to go any further. "Ask him whether he will swear that I am Jonathan Wild. If he cannot do this without hesitation, do not believe him! You need not fear that I shall ever disclose this place to a living soul, and if you will only afford me shelter for a little while (and I ask it not so much on my own account as upon that of my wounded companion) I will reward you liberally for your trouble. Look here—here!"

As he spoke, Jonathan pulled out of his pockets a great number of very valuable articles, for the reader will bear in mind that he carried about his person the greater portion of the booty he had taken since the escape.

He could tell by the expression visible on the faces of all the coiners that they beheld this wealth with the greatest possible amount of pleasure and satisfaction.

"Here is the swag," said Wild; "my companion and myself have collected it all upon the road—that's how it happened we got mistaken for Jonathan Wild and his associate. I am willing to divide this swag among you all if you will only give me the shelter that I require."

"Come, old man," said one of the coiners, "can you swear that this is Jonathan Wild, or have you been taking what the grabs said for gospel?"

"I am puzzled," said the old man; "my eyes are dim with age, and it is many years now since I last saw the villainous thief-taker;—this may be him, and it may not."

Wild saw that things were going on favourably for him, and he did what he could to increase the impression.

"Should you ever have guessed that I was Jonathan Wild if the grabs hadn't put the idea into your head?" he asked. "Answer that question truthfully, and I will be content."

"I should never have thought it," was the somewhat reluctant reply.

"Then," said Wild, calmly, "I imagine that quite settles the business. I am no more Jonathan Wild, and my companion is no more the Governor of Newgate, than any of you are; and, as I said before, all that we have between us—and it's a fine lot, I cantell you, for we have had a wonderful run of luck—shall be divided amongst you all, but in return for it I shall want you to attend to my companion's hurts. Are you agreed?"

"We are—we are!"

"All's well, then!" said Wild, in a voice which concealed the extreme amount of exultation which he felt. "All's well, and I hope that everyone present is perfectly satisfied that I am not Jonathan Wild!"

CHAPTER DXXXII.

JONATHAN WILD AND THE COINERS BECOME FAST FRIENDS.

It has been stated that Mr. Noakes had partially recovered his senses when he was picked up in the passage by the two coiners.

But his brain was confused, and he was unable to judge properly the nature of the events that were going on. His mind was in a perfect turmoil, yet the most prominent idea seemed to be the intense dread he had of being captured by the police officers.

If he once fell into their hands, he could hope for no mercy.

As he lay upon the ground, where the two coiners had deposited him, he began to grow much calmer.

At first, all that was going on around him sounded in his ears like some hoarse murmur.

By slow degrees, however, the sounds separated themselves, and became distinct.

With the greatest wonder, not altogether unmixed with astonishment, he heard Wild stoutly deny his own identity.

But he never for a moment believed that the coiners would allow themselves to be imposed upon so easily, and he waited the result with very great apprehension, for when the attempted deceit was discovered he concluded that very summary steps would be taken.

To his great relief and surprise, he found that the coiners were completely deceived.

After they had settled with Jonathan in the manner we have described, several of them came towards the wounded man, and one of them, stooping down, said:

"Will you swear that you are not the Governor of Newgate, and that that man on the table yonder is not Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker?"

That was a trying moment for Wild.

He had no means of judging how far Mr. Noakes had recovered his senses, nor did he know whether he had heard his recent declaration.

His fate hung upon the next few seconds, and it can be guessed with what intense anxiety he waited for his companion's reply.

"What a strange question to ask!" said Noakes, with more presence of mind and assurance than one would have believed he was capable of exhibiting. "You want me to swear that I am not the Governor of Newgate?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, of course I'll swear to it, for I never was and don't want to be! My name is Tom Price; but, I say, where's my pal?"

"Who's he?"

"Why, Joe Williams, to be sure!"

"Here I am," said Wild, as he stepped off the table.

"I am glad to find you are so much better."

"Yes, yes! But I am very weak."

"I hope," said Wild, "now that we have come to such a good understanding with each other, that you will, in return for the swag you have received, do what you can to restore my unfortunate companion to health."

"Is the wound serious?"

"No," replied Wild; "it's little more than skin-deep—in fact, so trifling that it was unnoticed, and all that ails him is weakness from loss of blood."

"We can soon put that all right, then."

"Now, old 'un," said one of the coiners, who seemed to have some kind of command over the rest, "go on upstairs, and mind you keep the place all right!"

It was the old man that he addressed, and, without the least hesitation, he left the underground cave, and made his way to the surface.

The coiners had some capital wine concealed in a little recess, and producing it, they administered some rather large doses of the stimulant to the wounded man.

Its effects were visible immediately.

New blood seemed to fill the veins of the unfortunate Governor, and after awhile he fell into a sound, heavy sleep, which the heat of the fire, close to which he lay, in some measure produced.

Jonathan soon made himself at home with the coiners—he laughed and chatted, and behaved in a manner that was most surprising, considering the dangers and difficulties of his position.

But he had been so critically situated lately that he looked upon this as perfect security.

Finding that the account of any desperate exploits on the highway was much relished by his new friends, he drew largely upon his imagination in order to amuse them.

They looked upon him as quite an excellent acquisition, and the thief-taker showed that he was well up to the mysteries of their business.

As the metal was in a fluid state, and as the moulds were all in readiness, the process of coining was proceeded with, and when anything was wanted, Jonathan Wild's hand was always ready.

"You have been up to this little game before!" said one of them.

Wild nodded his head as he replied:

"There are few things that I have not tried at one time or another of my life; and if, you keep to your word of finding us both shelter until my companion recovers from his wound, I will show you something well worth your attention!"

"Do you mean in coining?"

"Yes. I will show you how to put a few finishing touches, which will make the coins so perfect that they would deceive the most experienced!"

This was excellent intelligence.

Money was cast in prodigious quantities.

"You must have a good demand," said Wild, "or are you making a quantity to last you for a length of time?"

"This will all be gone in a couple of days or so," said one of the coiners, pointing to an immense heap of silver coins of all denominations.

"What shall you do with them?"

"We pack them up and send them off to London; we don't attempt to pass them off as the real coins, but sell them for what they really are. As a matter of course, we don't get very much for them; but then we don't run the risk we should if we attempted to utter them ourselves."

"I see; and you find it better not to run the risk?"

"Much better; because, by a little industry, we can get together a large amount."

"And whereabouts in London is it that you send them?" asked Wild.

The coiner smiled.

"Excuse me if I keep that secret to myself!" he said. "If you stay with us you will probably know, but I don't think it prudent to tell you just at present!"

"I admire your caution!" said the thief-taker. "I should act just in the same way myself!"

"You would if you had had the same amount of experience as we have."

As soon as the casting operation was over, the fire was allowed to go down, which was a great relief to all present, for, as the ventilation was very trifling, the heat was almost more than could be borne.

The coins were then removed from the moulds and placed along with the others in the heap.

They required a great deal of labour yet in the shape of finishing, for they were now in what they called "the rough."

It would appear, however, that they considered enough was done for the present.

The large table we have mentioned was cleared, and several small casks were rolled out of distant corners and placed round it.

On the top of these casks some planks of wood were put, so that capital accommodation was provided in the shape of seats.

Wine and spirits in unlimited quantity were then produced, and a regular carouse commenced.

Songs were sung, tales told, and Jonathan Wild appeared in quite a fresh character, for he did what he had never done in his life before.

That was, to try to make himself agreeable.

He fully succeeded, for he had a number of flash songs by heart, with which he treated the company, and many little circumstances continually suggested themselves to his mind, which served as a foundation upon which to erect some very extraordinary narratives.

All the coiners were delighted that they should have been so fortunate as to fall across so excellent a companion.

Not the least suspicion had a place in the minds of any of them.

Mr. Noakes still lay by the fire, slumbering profoundly.

We cannot do better than leave them while they are in such a comfortable situation as this, and other events were happening close at hand, such as the coiners and the thief-taker little dreamed of.

As his conduct must have amply shown, the police officer who headed the little party that had pursued Wild for so long was a very determined man, and his knowledge of the circumstance that he had been so nearly successful stimulated him to still greater exertions.

The reader will remember how surprised the thief-taker was when he found he had failed in baffling his pursuers.

As he had quite expected, the officers came round the first turning that he had taken, and as the fugitives were not in sight, they kept still ahead, for they imagined those of whom they were in pursuit had gone straight on.

But when, after proceeding some distance, they came to a portion of the lane which stretched itself out in a straight line for a mile at least, and as they looked forward they were unable to see the least signs of the fugitives, the suspicion first crossed their minds that they had been coming in the wrong direction.

So strong a hold did this take of their minds, that the commanding officer ordered his men to turn their horses' heads round and follow him.

They did so, and presently reached the turning which Wild had so artfully taken.

Whatever doubts they might previously have had were now completely set at rest, for, as they all pulled up at the corner of this turning, the head officer, looking down upon the ground, saw a large spot of blood about the size of half-a-crown.

He uttered a shout, and, bending towards it, he said:

"Behold, here is proof enough that they have come so far! I thought one of them was wounded, but I was not sure! Now, however, that point is quite set at rest,—we shall be able to track them easily enough!"

"Yes," said another police officer, "I can see several spots upon the ground."

"We ought to have noticed this before," said the one in command; "but I question whether we should have seen it now, had it not been for our happening to stop."

While the officers were going at a gallop, it was a matter of impossibility for them to see such a thing as a spot of blood upon the road.

"Dismount!" said the one in command. "You, Wilson, get down and look about you, and see which way the spots go."

The officer obeyed, and went prying about.

He went about a hundred yards down the lane without seeing another spot, and he was just about to turn back, under the impression that the fugitives had not gone that way, when he was ordered to try a few yards further.

He did so, and then set up a shout which brought all his companions immediately around him.

On one side of the road there was quite a large pool

of blood, and a mark as though some one had lain there.

By looking closely the officers managed to discern many marks of horses' feet.

"Here is proof positive that they have come as far as this," said the one in command. "Can you trace the marks any further?"

There was a great deal of blood near where the Governor had fallen, but after that there was none.

Coming, then, to the little plantation or wood which we have mentioned as being situated on one side of the road and bounded by strong palisades, the officer paused and divided his men into two portions, in order to make a complete circuit of it.

It so happened that that portion of the troop that he remained with followed exactly in Wild's footsteps.

Presently they came to another crimson spot.

This was where the horses had stood still for a few minutes, while Jonathan pulled down the paling.

It was not long before they found the woodwork had been displaced, and the fractures showed that they had been recently made.

They pulled a piece of fence down instantly, and entering the wood, they found another spot.

This was where the thief-taker had stopped the horses while he replaced the fence in its original position.

That they were now on the right track was perfectly clear, so the officer summoned the other half of his troop.

Having united once more, they pushed on through the wood, but though they looked about them with the greatest care they were unable to discover any further indications.

At last, however, they emerged near the brook, and here again they got upon the track.

The next thing they saw was the smoke curling up from the chimney of the hut, and they made their way towards this, partly in expectation of getting some assistance should it prove to be a keeper's lodge, and partly because they imagined they might glean some intelligence.

What passed upon their arrival at the hut we have already described, and also how they went on searching among the trees and undergrowth.

The wood was not of any great extent, and the officers were not long in searching it thoroughly, but they could find no more signs of the fugitives, which is not to be wondered at.

The commanding officer was in a great state of exasperation.

It seemed very hard to be baffled after having been so very near to effecting his purpose.

He ordered a halt, and commanded his men to keep perfectly silent.

Dismounting from his steed, he clasped his hands behind his back, and, with his head bent forward and his eyes fixed upon the ground, he paced up and down for several minutes, endeavouring to decide upon his future plan of operations, and also reviewing the whole of the occurrences that had taken place.

It was while he was thus engaged that a dim suspicion entered his mind that there might be some mystery connected with the hut.

The old man might have been bribed by Jonathan Wild to hold his peace, and yet this suspicion seemed hardly a well-grounded one, and the real fact of the matter is that he only fixed upon it because he could not think of anything else, and account for the disappearance of the two fugitives in any other way.

This, however, furnished him with a basis, and by dint of hard thinking he presently elaborated a scheme which he imagined would entirely set at rest his doubts.

What that scheme was we shall now proceed to describe.

CHAPTER DXXXIII.

THE CHIEF POLICE OFFICER HAS HIS SUSPICIONS CONCERNING THE OLD HUT IN THE WOOD.

In the first place, however, we must more particularly advert to the general arrangements which had been made by the coiners in order to avoid detection.

The hut itself, then, was a mere blind.

It was occupied by the old man, who ostensibly obtained a livelihood by gathering firewood.

But this was a mere pretence.

His duties were to guard against any sudden discovery.

Had it not been for the hut above, the coiners would soon have been detected, for they could not by any possibility carry on their trade without the aid of a fire.

A fire entailed smoke, and if this had been allowed to ascend it would certainly have attracted suspicion.

But this difficulty was got over by very simple means.

A large pipe conveyed the smoke which arose from the furnace into the chimney of the hut above, and the old man was instructed never to omit making a fire in the grate in the hut, so that if anyone entered they would not be surprised at seeing the smoke.

It will be seen, then, that the post the old man held, and the duties he performed, were rather important.

He had chiefly been selected on account of his age, which, while it disabled him from taking any active part in the manufacture of the spurious coins, yet enabled him to sustain the part of a woodman to very great perfection.

After leaving the cave, as he had been bidden, the old man ascended to the hut and carefully replaced the wooden planks, which formed at the same time a flooring to the hut itself, as well as a covering for the secret entrance to the cave.

Knowing that the furnace was in full operation down below, he piled up a quantity of green boughs on the hearth, which sent forth a considerable quantity of very dense smoke as soon as the fire began to make an impression.

This done, he drew a little stool close up to the hearth, and, sitting down upon it, he bent his head upon his hands, and apparently gave himself up to deep thought.

The subject of his meditations was the events which had recently taken place.

He felt that he would have given much to make certain whether the man to whom he had given shelter was really Jonathan Wild.

Upon this point, however, he could not decide, and he tried hard to recall to his aged and wandering recollection the precise appearance of the thief-taker.

He succeeded tolerably well, but upon comparing the two he was reluctantly compelled to admit that there was but a slight—very slight—resemblance.

While thus engaged, his quick ear suddenly caught the sound of an approaching footstep.

He listened, throwing off in an instant all his pre-occupation.

The footstep which came towards the hut was a feeble, halting one, and the old man began to wonder who it could possibly be.

It was an unusual thing for anyone to approach this lonely habitation, but already on this eventful day he had had two visits, and now there seemed every probability that he was about to have a third.

Whoever it might be that was approaching, it was quite certain, for some cause or other, walked very, very slowly, and, in fact, the old man began to lose all patience.

At last, however, there came a strange, blundering kind of knock against the door, and a voice cried out feebly:

"Help, help! Save me, or I die!"

The old man listened to the words with great surprise.

At first he could neither move nor speak.

Then there came upon his ears a feeble groan.

"Who is there?" he at length managed to ask. "What do you want?"

"Help, help! I am badly hurt! Help, help!"

The old man went towards the door and opened it.

Crouching down on the ground he saw the figure of a man.

A second glance showed him that he was attired in the costume of a police officer.

This made the old man draw back.

The officer perceived the movement, for he added:

"Have mercy upon me, old man!—have mercy upon me, or I perish!"

"I—I cannot help you! I am a poor man, all alone in this hut!"

"Let me crawl beneath your roof! I much fear that I shall die! Oh, I am badly hurt! My head—my head!"

While speaking, the police officer, with a slow and apparently very painful movement, dragged himself

along until he was fairly beneath the roof of the hut.

The old man looked down and saw that the officer had got a large handkerchief soaked in blood wound many times round his head.

It gave him a most horrible and ghastly look, more especially as some of the blood had trickled down his visage.

These crimson tears all left their mark behind them.

Now that he was inside, there was no help for it, so the old man closed and fastened the door.

Evidently, he was rather puzzled to know what to do, and whether he was acting rightly.

At any rate, he considered he had better try to get rid of him as soon as possible.

"Are you badly hurt?" he said.

"Very!" replied the officer, with a hideous groan.

"Shot?"

"Yes, in the head!"

"Are you not one of the officers who called here some time back?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then, have you seen those of whom you are in search?"

"Alas, no!"

"Then how is it that you are hurt?"

"I have hardly breath enough left to tell you! We were searching about after the escaped prisoners——"

"Yes——yes?"

"I separated myself from the rest——oh, fool that I was! My companions heard me among the trees, and, not knowing who I was——"

"Fired upon you in mistake, I suppose?"

"That is it."

"Why did they not aid you?"

"They left me for dead. I recovered my senses to find I was alone. With much pain and difficulty I dragged myself to this place, and——and you see I am here!"

"But," said the old man, "I am afraid I can be of little assistance to you."

"Alas, then, I must die!"

"Nay, not so," replied the old man.

In his heart, nothing would have pleased him better than for the officer to have given up the ghost there and then; but, for the sake of avoiding suspicion, he was compelled to dissemble.

The officer continued to groan most hideously.

"Ahem!" said the old man. "If you will take my advice——"

"I will do so, gladly!"

"Then you will muster up what strength remains, and I will lead you the nearest way out of the wood, and not leave you until I see you deposited in some place where your hurts will be properly attended to."

"Many, many thanks!"

"Will you make the trial?"

"Nay, I fear——"

"What?"

"That I have not sufficient strength."

"Try!"

The officer made an attempt to rise from the ground, but failed.

He fell back heavily.

"Water——water!" he gasped. "Bring me water, or I perish! Oh, I burn—I burn! Fire and fury! Water——water!"

"I will get some!"

"Pray do, and you shall name your own reward!"

The old man went to his pitcher, but it contained no water.

Wild had emptied it.

"Alas!" he said, "I have none!"

"No water?"

"No."

"Then I die! But surely there is water close at hand! Surely for the sake of a dying man you will fetch some! I myself saw a brook at no great distance from this place."

"And that's the nearest water there is."

"It is not far! Go, go——pray go! Oh, heaven! I burn—I burn! Oh, what would I not give for a little water!"

The officer seemed to be in a very bad way indeed.

The old man was in a bit of a fix.

It was almost more than his life was worth to allow anyone to remain at the hut alone——much less a police officer——because of the risk there would be of the secret entrance being discovered.

But when he looked down and saw to what a helpless condition this officer had been reduced, the old man thought there would not be so very much harm in leaving him there while he repaired to the brook.

He could be back in a moment or so, and if the officer had a good draught of water he might recover sufficiently to be led away.

This was what the old man most devoutly wished, and it was with this hope that he took up his pitcher and went towards the door.

The officer now seemed to be so far gone as to be quite unconscious of what was happening around him.

With all possible speed the old man passed through the door and hurried off towards the brook.

He turned round once or twice, and, as he had taken the precaution to leave the door open behind him, he was able to see the officer still lying immovable upon the floor.

But he could not see with what a burning eye the officer glared after him.

As soon as over the trees concealed the old man from his view, the officer sprang to his feet.

"Curse the old fellow!" he said. "I thought I was never going to get rid of him! Well, he's off at last——that's some comfort! I rather think I have managed to carry out my plan pretty well. This blood and the handkerchief, and all that sort of thing, has quite taken him in! There is some mystery connected with this place, I am certain!"

These words will be sufficient to let the reader know that the individual who uttered them was no less than the chief officer.

He had carried out his plan so far, but what he intended to do eventually remains to be seen.

He had resolved to gain shelter in the hut, and keep a sharp look-out about him, so as to decide whether his suspicions had a good foundation.

The easiest and best means he could think of for the accomplishment of this purpose was to simulate being badly wounded.

In order to carry out this idea to its fullest extent, he had made his way to that particular spot on the margin of the brook where Jonathan Wild had dressed Mr. Noakes's wound.

There was quite a pool of blood and water here, and in this the officer soaked his large handkerchief until it was stained through and through.

One of his subordinates bound this disagreeable bandage round his head, and tied it tight.

When these preparations with regard to himself had been completed, the officer issued his instructions to his men.

These were to the effect that they should conceal themselves among the underwood as close to the hut as they possibly could.

Here they were to wait for his signal.

As soon as they heard it they were to break into the hut by main force if necessary, and make all speed to his assistance, for he announced his intention of not giving the signal until the very moment when he required their aid.

Having made these preparations, the officer crawled towards the hut, practising on the way the part he had to perform.

He had knocked and gained admittance, as we have already described.

His men saw that his manoeuvre had so far been crowned with success, and as they fully shared in his suspicions concerning the hut, they waited the final result with the utmost anxiety and impatience.

CHAPTER DXXXIV.

DESCRIBES WHAT SUCCESS THE OFFICER MET WITH IN MAKING HIS RESEARCHES IN THE HUT.

THAT this police officer was a very courageous man all our readers will allow.

No ordinary amount of nerve would be required to enable anyone to carry out such a scheme.

He resolved to make the best of the opportunity which



[THE CHIEF POLICE OFFICER THREATENS THE OLD MAN IN THE HUT.]

the old man's temporary absence afforded him, and so, with great haste, he looked about him.

After a hasty glance at the interior, his first act was to feel round the walls, for his idea was that there was a secret doorway somewhere.

In this he was mistaken, but presently his hand encountered one of the projections which we have mentioned as having been made use of by the old man in making his ascent to the roof.

Looking up, the officer saw more above his head, and instantly guessed the use to which they would be put.

But he did not guess that they merely led up to a movable plank in the roof, which, when removed, would allow anyone to reconnoitre without.

This he fancied must surely be the secret.

He was, indeed, strongly tempted to make the ascent, but just then he heard the old man returning.

To lie down in his former position was the work of an instant, and for fear he should not have hit upon the exact

spot, he writhed about as though he was suffering very great pain.

This was a ready and capital thought, since it would effectually disarm any suspicions that the old man might have.

"Here is the water!" he cried.

The officer only groaned and writhed about more than ever, and then became silent.

"Here is the water! Dear me, I do believe he's gone at last! Well, I hope he's died in peace, and all that sort of thing."

The officer groaned again, and at once put an end to the old man's hopes concerning his decease.

"Water—water!" he gasped.

He poured some roughly down the throat of the supposed wounded man.

The officer pretended to revive.

"Thanks—thanks!" he murmured. "That cool draught has filled me with new life! You shall be well

rewarded for this, never fear. I will reward you, old man."

"Can you rise, think you?"

"I will try."

After several abortive attempts, the officer rose to a sitting posture.

"Oh, my head—my head!" he cried. "I am afraid it is a case with me!"

"Drink a little more water!"

"I cannot!"

"It will do more to revive you than anything else—try!"

As he spoke, the old man held the pitcher to the officer's lips, who drank a small quantity, but not much, for he preferred a stronger beverage.

"Are you better now, sir?" asked the old man, anxiously.

"Very little."

"Let me assist you to your feet; I can show you a very near way out of the wood, and will take you to a public-house where you will receive every attention. Come, sir—come!"

The anxiety of the old man to get rid of his visitor was too palpable to be overlooked, and while he spoke these last words he endeavoured, with what strength he had, to raise the officer.

That individual prolonged the scene, however, in the hope that something or other might turn up.

But the silence of the grave prevailed in and about that place.

As he rolled his eyes around, as though he was suffering great agony, he took particular notice of every portion of the interior of the hut.

With the exception of the projections in the wall, which we have before mentioned, he saw nothing of a suspicious character.

Therefore, it was only natural that he should make up his mind to the effect that they were connected with the secret he so much wished to discover.

The old man tugged away at him in a desperate manner, and the more desire he showed to get rid of his visitor the greater became the officer's suspicions.

At last, as he had no longer any pretence to offer, he stood up.

The old man's eyes brightened, for he really thought he was about to see the back of this troublesome officer.

He was never more mistaken in his life.

As soon as he was fairly on his feet, the officer seized the old man by the throat with a grip of such tightness that he found himself unable to utter a single cry for aid.

The officer shook him backwards and forwards until he was within an ace of strangulation; then, suddenly releasing his hold, the man fell, and lay in a confused heap upon the floor of the hut.

The officer sat himself down in a moment by the old man's side, and drawing his cutlass, he flourished it in a furious manner.

The old man had received a very sudden shock, for the thought that his visitor was only playing a part and was not wounded at all had never once entered his mind.

He could scarcely believe in the reality of the sudden change that had taken place.

His faculties were quickened and his convictions strengthened, however, by the glitter of the cutlass, which induced some very uncomfortable feelings indeed.

The officer turned the point of the sharp weapon against the old man's breast, and then he said in a stern but suppressed voice:

"Utter a single syllable above a whisper, and I will run you through instantly—beware!"

The old man's eyes rolled fearfully, and he gasped painfully for breath.

"Do you hear?" said the officer, pressing the point of the cutlass against the breast of his coat—"do you understand what I say?"

The old man nodded violently.

"That will do, then."

"You—you—you are not wounded?" said the old man, stammeringly.

"Certainly not," replied the officer, with a grin.

"Then why are you here?"

"Because I have my suspicions, or rather something more than suspicions."

While he spoke these words, the officer fixed a peculiar glance upon the old man, who quailed beneath it.

He tried to laugh it off, and said:

"Suspicious of a poor old man like myself? Nonsense!"

"Don't speak quite so loud, my friend," said the officer.

"Tell me, then, of what you are suspicious."

"I will, and something more besides. I have searched this wood thoroughly with my men, and we have failed to find a trace of the men we seek."

"What of that?"

The old man spoke half defiantly.

His first fear, when the officer spoke, was, that he had suspected the existence of the underground place, where the coining operations were carried on.

Now, however, he found that the officer's suspicious extended only to the disappearance of the two men of whom they were in search.

Such being the case, he felt his courage reviving, for he had the greatest possible amount of confidence in the opening in the floor escaping detection.

Some very cunningly-contrived place would have been in much greater danger of discovery, for the floor of the hut was, as we have already stated, covered over with loose planks, which had the appearance of having been laid upon the ground in order to obtain a dry and firm flooring.

The officer noticed the manner in which the old man had asked the last question, and wondered what could be the meaning of the alteration in his behaviour.

This he hoped to ascertain; so he said:

"It amounts to this, my friend—we have tracked these two men very close to your cottage, and I feel almost certain that you have secreted them somewhere."

"Oh, do you?"

"I do; and if you have, you will best consult your own interests by telling me where they are, and take your share of the reward; provided you do this, I will take care that not a word is said about your having secreted them—you shall get into no trouble on that account."

"You are very kind, and very liberal in your promises," replied the old man, "but I can't avail myself of them; I don't like the manner in which you have set about this; but I suppose that is neither here nor there."

"Neither here nor there, as you say," repeated the officer. "Now, look here—I will give you one more chance; tell me where you have hidden the two men, or which way they have taken!"

"I know nothing about them!" returned the old man, doggedly. "I told you so at first, and you might have believed me."

"I did not believe you, and that's plain truth! Take it for all in all, this is a very suspicious-looking place indeed!"

"Suspicious?" faltered the old man, for these few words caused him to lose his self-possession again.

"Yes, suspicious!" answered the officer. "Let me advise you to make a clean breast of the whole affair; if you don't, why, you will get into trouble along with the rest!"

"I can tell you nothing, because I know nothing! What is there suspicious in this place?"

The old man's voice quivered as he asked this question.

He put it because he wished to hear the worst at once.

"Many things," replied the officer. "In the first place, I may mention these projections in the wall."

The old man smiled.

"Why are they there?" asked the officer.

"Can't you guess?"

"I guess there's something secret connected with them; I don't know what at present, but I am determined to find out!"

"If that's all," said the old man, "I can explain it easily enough."

The officer watched him narrowly.

"They only enable me to climb to the roof of the hut; there's a trap-door just above."

"But what do you want to climb up for?"

"Various reasons—various reasons! This is a strange and lonely place for a man to dwell in, and many villainous characters—such as poachers, for instance—are often abroad."

"Then I understand you that you use that place to reconnoitre from?"

"Just so—just so! And what is there suspicious in that, I should like to know?"

"Nothing, only you see I don't happen to believe a word of it. Once more—will you tell me where these men are? I feel more and more certain that they are somewhere close by every moment!"

"I am sorry you have taken that idea into your head," said the old man. "I don't know how I shall disabuse you of it."

"I will have a search round the place, then," said the officer, at length. "Sit where you are. If you move, it will be at the peril of your life!"

"But you have no right to treat me in this manner!"

"Yes, I have. I suspect you of harbouring and abetting felons, and if I can prove it against you, you shall suffer dearly for your obstinacy!"

These words let the old man know that the officer was a bold, determined man, and by no means inclined to be trifled with.

"If you attempt to move hand or foot from where you now are," said the officer, "you're a dead man! I warn you, and if you refuse to take notice of it you must abide by the consequences!"

So saying, the police officer crossed the hut towards the projections in the wall, concerning which he felt the greatest possible amount of curiosity.

He was not at all satisfied by the explanation that had been given.

With considerable agility he climbed up, looking round continually, so as to observe whether the old man offered to move.

But he sat perfectly still, just where he had been left, watching the movements of his visitor.

While the officer was pursuing his researches in that quarter the old man cared little, because he knew very well that he could not find anything out.

The officer reached the top in a moment, and stretching up one hand, easily removed the loose plank.

He then raised his body a little higher, in order to take a good look outside.

While the officer was thus engaged, many thoughts were fitting through the old man's mind.

First of all, he determined to place the utmost confidence in the excellence of the hiding-place, and then, when the officer put his head out of the roof, he thought what a good job it would be if he could put an end to his life altogether.

No sooner did this thought occur to him than, without further reflection, he proceeded to put it into execution.

In the breast of his coat he carried a pistol.

Drawing this with great rapidity, he hastily levelled it at the bulky form of the police officer, pulled the trigger, and fired.

In that confined space the report was rather stunning.

With a crash the officer fell to the earth.

The old man sprang to his feet with an exultant cry upon his lips.

Very soon, however, it changed its character, until at last it became a yell of horror.

The hasty rushing of many footsteps outside came upon his ears.

Then the door was burst open, and in a second the hut was filled by police officers.

CHAPTER DXXXV.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS HIMSELF MENACED BY A DOUBLE DANGER.

THE signal agreed upon between the officer and his men was the report of a pistol, and this explains how it was that they all rushed pell-mell into the hut as soon as the old man fired.

He little thought when he committed the rash act that such would be the result, or assuredly he would not have pulled the trigger.

Nor did he even have the consolation which would have been afforded him had the officer been wounded.

It so happened, however, that he entirely escaped the bullet, although it passed very close to him indeed.

He had scarcely put his head out and glanced over the roof before he became conscious of the imprudence of which he had been guilty.

The old man was out of his sight, and there was no knowing what he might be tempted to do.

Such a thought as this was quite sufficient to make him lower his head and take a peep into the interior of the hut.

He saw the old man with a pistol in his hand aiming at him.

With admirable presence of mind, he then relaxed his hold of the projections in the wall, and allowed himself to drop to the ground.

Although he was severely bruised and shaken by the process, yet there can be little doubt that he entirely owed his life to it, for at such a short distance, with anything like a reasonable amount of care, the old man could not fail to hit his mark.

The officer struggled to his feet.

He was in pain, but nevertheless he cried out in a clear voice:

"Secure that man, and see that he attempts no further mischief!"

The idea of resisting so many well-armed men did not for a moment enter into the imagination of the owner of the hut.

So he gave in as peaceably as his captors possibly could wish.

The chief officer came limping towards him.

"You hoary old wretch!" he cried. "Is this the return you make for the forbearance I have shown towards you up to this moment? But you shall suffer for it! My suspicious are now changed into certainties, and if I can, I most certainly will have a halter put round your neck!"

The old man looked dogged and sullen, but could not, for the life of him, say a word in his own behalf.

Whether the existence of the underground apartment was discovered or not, he would certainly be marched off a prisoner, and this prospect filled him with the liveliest dread.

Moreover, his opinion as to the probability of the coining operations being discovered considerably changed.

The officers were impressed with the opinion that there was something mysterious in the place, and so many of them searching about in so circumscribed a space could scarcely fail to discover the secret of the floor.

Two officers were bidden by the chief to keep the old man safe prisoner, while the others were instructed to disperse themselves about the building, and closely examine every square inch of it.

They went all round the walls in the first place, examining them in various ways, but in a very little while they were unwillingly forced to come to the conclusion that there was no secret in connection with them.

Nor could there be any secret with respect to the roof, for the rafters upon which the planks had been placed were plainly enough visible when they looked up.

Nothing more remained but the floor, and, strange as it may appear, they did not once show the least suspicion with regard to it.

At length, however, when they found there was really nothing more for them to do, and nothing left to examine, they, more with a view to occupying themselves than anything else, began to lift up the planks.

That they should happen to pitch upon the precise spot where the opening was is scarcely reasonable to suppose.

Consequently, the first half-dozen planks or so that they lifted up disclosed nothing but the bare ground.

This happened to be sticky and damp, which at once gave them a reason why the planks had been laid down.

The chief officer all the while kept his eyes riveted upon the countenance of the old man.

Such being the case, he noticed that when the first planks were lifted up the old man trembled and changed colour.

Who can wonder at this, however? for he quite gave himself up for lost.

Most bitterly did he curse the hour when Jonathan Wild arrived at the hut and besought his shelter.

Most bitterly did he curse himself for having acceded to the request.

But for this, it was easy to see that all would have been well.

Perceiving the change which took place in the old man's demeanour, the chief officer drew his conclusions therefrom, and at once instructed his men to lift up the whole of the planks.

This was a task easily performed, and one that consumed a very small quantity of time, for the hut was only a little place, and, as a matter of course, did not require many planks to cover it.

In something less than a minute, then, after he had issued this command, his subordinates set up a shout, which indicated an important discovery.

"Silence!" said their commander, instantly; "raise no alarm. What is it you have found?"

"An opening in the floor, leading somewhere underground."

The old man uttered a sound, something between a scream and a groan, and then relapsed into entire insensibility.

While in this condition he was easily kept prisoner, and the chief officer, no longer having any apprehensions on his account, hastened to the large opening round which his men stood.

"This is the secret," he cried, as soon as he beheld it. How blind I must have been not to have thought of it before! We are on the right track at last, and, who knows? we may find out something else, the discovery of which will amply reward us."

These words were uttered at random, but shortly afterwards they were strangely confirmed.

Looking more closely on the sloping path that led to the coiners' cellar, the officers detected the prints made by horses' hoofs.

Leaving the two men who had charge of the old man to keep guard in the hut, the officer commanded the rest to follow him as closely as they could.

Believing that they had at last run the fox to earth, the officers were all highly elated.

The capture of Jonathan Wild and his companion seemed certain.

Down the sloping path the officers crept as noiselessly as they could, until presently their commander, finding how rapidly the darkness increased, ordered one of them to procure a light.

This was easily done, for all carried dark lanterns about their persons.

One was lighted, and only one, for the officer did not wish to have so much light as would give the fugitives warning of their approach, but only just sufficient to enable them to avoid running against any obstacle or falling into any snare.

The bottom of the descent was soon reached, and then the passage spread out before the officers which led to the door of the coining apartment.

First of all they came to the curtain that had been hung before the door so as to obstruct sound.

This was a contrivance that made the officer suspect they were going to find out something of a singular nature.

They had found the same means used in many flash kens in the metropolis.

The curtain was dashed aside, and then the murmuring of voices could be plainly distinguished.

In between the space formed by the curtain and the door the two horses had been left.

Here they were found by the officers, who took possession of them immediately.

Having found the steeds, it was but reasonable to conclude that their riders were not far off, and indeed the discovery of the door was instantly made.

"Now, my lads," said the chief officer, in a whisper, "I don't know how that door is fastened, or whether it is fastened at all; however, we must not stand upon ceremony. Get all of you together and give one rush, so as to bear it down at once, and we shall take them by surprise then."

All the officers were in a state of the greatest possible excitement.

They did not require twice bidding.

Closing together in a dense body, they dashed impetuously at the door.

It was a strong one and well secured, but there were few doors calculated to withstand such an assault as that.

It cracked ominously, shook in its frame, and showed every symptom of giving way.

A loud shout reached them from the interior.

Then came a confusion of voices and the trampling of many feet.

"Again—again!" cried the chief officer. "One more rush, and all will be over! Down with it!"

The men uttered a faint hurrah, and once more precipitated themselves against the door.

Down it went with a terrible crash, and such was the violence which the officers had made use of that they were carried into the very centre of the apartment before they could bring themselves to a standstill.

The strange and unexpected sight which met their view took them completely by surprise, and for a few seconds they could do nothing more than glare around them.

As before, the apartment was brilliantly illuminated by the fire in the furnace, though a hasty attempt had been made by some of the coiners to extinguish it.

"A nest of coiners, by Jove!" cried the chief officer, as soon as ever he could recover himself sufficiently to speak. "Hurrah, my lads! we are in luck's way, and no mistake! Down with them all!"

The elation of the police officers was extreme, for, as we have previously had occasion to remark, the manufacture of base coin was carried on about that period to an extent that was truly alarming.

A universal panic threatened to be the result of it, and the most strenuous efforts were made to bring the offenders to justice.

In spite of this, however, the trade flourished; and to such perfection had these men arrived that none but a well-practised person could detect the spurious from the genuine coin.

Large rewards were offered for the apprehension of all who were in any way engaged in the nefarious traffic; and not a single Monday went by without many wretches—men, women, and even children too—being executed at Tyburn for this offence alone, for in those days the manufacturing and uttering of base coin was punished by death.

This the officers, of course, knew very well, and consequently they looked forward to making quite a golden harvest.

Before we proceed further, however, it will be necessary for us to return to Jonathan Wild.

It will be understood that Jonathan Wild remained with the coiners for several hours before he was disturbed by the police officers in the manner we have just described.

There came at last an end to the conviviality in which they had been indulging.

Mr. Noakes woke up and felt wonderfully better.

A slight feeling of lassitude was the only effect he experienced from his wound.

He was supplied with food and another prodigious dose of wine, which seemed to be instantly transformed into new blood.

Once more he lay down to slumber, and this time Jonathan Wild followed his example.

The coiners seemed to sleep likewise; but no sooner had they made sure that their two guests were slumbering soundly than they rose, and forming into a dense group, conversed earnestly in rapid whispers.

"I have my doubts," said one, "and the general safety requires that they should be set at rest either one way or the other."

"Right!" said another voice. "I have my doubts too!"

"Did you notice," added a third, "how his countenance changed at times, and what an alteration there would be in the tones of his voice?"

"Yes—yes!" they all cried, eagerly.

"No one could fail to notice it," said the one who had first spoken, "and that was what first had the effect of arousing my suspicions."

"He may be what he professes," said another, "but my own opinion is that we have given shelter to Jonathan Wild."

"If we can only prove that, he shall die!"

"He shall—he shall!" they all cried, as if with one voice.

"I wish we had one of our London hands here, as we have at times," exclaimed another—"he would, ten to one, be able to get us out of our difficulty."

"Stop!" said another. "I have just recollected something, and now I have done so, I am surprised I should have forgotten it."

"What is it?"

"Hush, and I will tell you. Don't you recollect hearing that some time ago, when Blueskin was going to be brought up for trial, Jonathan Wild aggravated the prisoner, who, seizing a knife, suddenly rushed forward and stabbed the thief-taker in the throat?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Of course you all know that Jonathan Wild had as narrow an escape for his life as any man possibly could have, but he recovered."

"He did."

"Well, of course you know now what I am driving at. No man could possibly receive such a wound as that without carrying the marks of it to his grave."

"That's true enough."

"Then it is perfectly easy," said another, "for us to set our doubts at rest. All we have to do is to creep up to him gently as he lies there slumbering. If we can see the scar of a serious wound upon his throat, then I think we may safely conclude that what he has told us has been nothing but lies, and that he is really and truly Jonathan Wild, as we first of all suspected."

This did indeed seem a ready means of solving the difficulty.

Cautiously, two or three crept forward.

The two fugitives were lying down close to the furnace, slumbering heavily.

There could be no doubt about it. One glance was quite enough to show that in this, at least, the thief-taker and his companion were practising no dissimulation.

It was always Wild's practice to wear a very thick neckcloth wound many times round his throat.

He used to do this long before he received the fearful wound that Blueskin gave him.

It will no doubt be recollected that it was to this circumstance he owed his life; for, had his neck not been protected in such a manner, Blueskin would certainly have accomplished his intention of ridding the world of such a monster.

Ever since that time, Jonathan had worn a thicker neckcloth, and wound it round his neck more times than ever.

Perhaps, after his experience, he thought that it might be the means of saving his life a second time.

When the coiners stooped down over him, they saw how closely his neck was enveloped in the folds, and one glance was sufficient to show them that it would be necessary to remove the neckcloth before they could ascertain whether or not a scar existed.

This was a delicate operation.

The coiners were light-fingered, however, and most of them had, at some time or other, varied their present employment by picking pockets.

One of them held up his hand, and said, in a whisper:

"I will try if I can't manage this. I don't think I shall wake him."

"No, no," said the others, with a smile. "Nimble Ned can do it if anyone can."

"It's all right," said the one who had been called Nimble Ned. "Don't you make a noise, and I won't disturb him."

"I don't think you need be much frightened," said another. "He has drunk a tremendous amount of wine, and he seemed greatly fatigued. It wouldn't be a trifle that would rouse him from his slumber."

Nimble Ned made no other reply to this speech than to hold up his finger as a request for silence.

The demand was immediately complied with, and then he set to work about his task.

Jonathan was lying in a very awkward position for the accomplishment of his purpose, and Nimble Ned so about making him move in a very ingenious manner.

He tickled his neck with one hand.

Jonathan immediately made a restless movement.

Nimble Ned repeated the operation, and the same result followed.

Still the thief-taker did not lie conveniently for his purpose, so he ventured to tickle him once more.

This time the result was perfectly satisfactory, for Wild struck out with his arms, and finally rolled over on to his back, where he lay as still as death.

Nothing now remained to be done but to untie the neckcloth, which was a very simple operation indeed to the practised fingers of Nimble Ned.

The unwinding of it, however, from all its complicated convolutions was not so easy, and more than once he had to desist, for he feared the thief-taker would awake.

Presently, however, the last fold was removed.

Wild's neck was exposed.

Just at this instant, one of the coiners standing near, finding that the fire did not give out a sufficient quantity of light, stirred it vigorously.

A bright flame shot up, which revealed everything with what might be called painful distinctness.

"Look!" said Nimble Ned, in an energetic whisper—"look—there is the scar, and a dreadful one it is! Why, the place is not half healed as it ought to be! Look—there can be no doubt about it! Now we know who he is! There lies Jonathan Wild!"

What would have been done at this juncture is hard to say, had not something of an unexpected character occurred.

The thief-taker made a sudden movement and uttered a cry.

The coiners started back.

All were impressed with the idea that the thief-taker was about to awake.

Such was not the case, however.

Wild was dreaming one of his old dreams, which made slumber a hideous torment to him.

The manner in which he had been disturbed had probably had some effect upon his vision.

He seemed to be struggling desperately with some invisible foe, and indistinct, half-uttered words came from his lips.

Their first alarm having subsided, the coiners with the greatest curiosity listened, in the hope of being able to make out what was said.

Some words only met their ears.

"Noakes—Noakes!" Jonathan cried, in accents that could not be mistaken—"Noakes, you damned coward! why don't you come to my assistance? Help, help! Oh, curses!"

CHAPTER DXXXVI.

THE COINERS ARE DEFEATED IN THEIR LITTLE SCHEME FOR MAKING THE THIEF-TAKER PRISONER.

EVEN if the coiners had failed to discover the scar upon the neck of their strange guest, the unguarded words which came from his lips during his uneasy slumber would have gone far towards confirming their suspicions and establishing his identity.

Considered in connection with the discovery, however, they formed an irresistible proof.

The coiners did not proceed to take any immediate steps, although their doubts were completely dispelled.

Once more they all grouped together, and, with anxious countenances and bated breath, commenced a hurried whispered conversation.

"You see I was quite right," said the coiner who had expressed his doubts so strongly from the first. "All is confirmed!"

"Yes, yes! There is no doubt about that!"

"Yonder," he cried, "lie the forms of Jonathan Wild and Noakes, the ex-Governor of Newgate!"

"It is so!" cried Nimble Ned. "I would stake my life upon it; and what we have to do, is to decide upon the steps that will be best for us to take."

"That's a difficult matter," said the first, "and one that ought not to be decided upon too hastily."

"I think the quickest and best plan," said Nimble Ned, with a grin, "would be to slip a rope round both their necks and strangle them."

"It would be a good deed done," said another, approvingly.

"No," said the first, "we can do better than that."

"How?"

"By your proposal we shall reap no benefit by their death. Now, I propose to turn it to our advantage."

"Do you mean by surrendering them to the police?"

"Yes—why not?"

"It is dangerous!"

"Not if we are careful. If you are inclined to listen, mates, I will tell you what my idea is, and when I have done so, I think you will agree with me in concluding that this will be the best night's work we have done for a long time."

Eager and curious, the others clustered around him, and bade him proceed.

"Let us take advantage of their slumbers to bind them securely hand and foot with ropes, in such a manner that it will be totally impossible for them to shake a finger in their defence."

"And what then?"

"Patience, and you shall hear. When we have secured them in this manner, I should propose that we carry them to the police officers and claim the reward."

"That's a good idea," said another; "and moreover, I am much mistaken if they have not many valuable articles concealed about their persons, although they professed to empty their pockets before us."

"Very likely," said Nimble Ned; "but whether that is so or not, we have their horses."

"Yes," cried another, "and they are worth no trifle. They are a couple of as fine steeds as ever you would wish to see. I wonder where they got them from!"

"That is no concern of ours. But now, my comrades, I want to know whether you are agreeable that the plan I have proposed be carried out?"

"Quite—quite!"

"Come on, then,—let us proceed about it at once, for fear they should awake. It is not worth while to delay."

They nodded, and then stole on tiptoe closer to the spot where the fugitives lay.

Jonathan had moved slightly since they left him.

He still lay upon his back, with his limbs extended, but now one arm was raised in such a manner as to cast a shadow over his face.

The fact was, he had awoke.

His slumber, having been disturbed, and vexed moreover by a dream in which was enacted all that had lately happened, came to an end.

After he awoke, however, he lay quite still, for at first he was unable to remember precisely where he was or what had last happened.

This might partly be ascribed to the multitude of events which had recently befallen him, and partly to the immense quantity of wine he had drunk before he laid himself down by the side of his companion.

After gently opening his eyes, the first thing of which he became conscious was a low, murmuring sound.

He closed his eyes again, for he fancied he could then hear with greater plainness.

Of course this was only fancy.

The coiners had taken the precaution to get as far away as possible, and, as they conversed in tones not louder than a whisper, the thief-taker had to stretch his sense of hearing to the utmost degree.

The mere fact of their being thus collected together and speaking in whispers was more than sufficient to arouse all his suspicions.

It so happened, then, that he heard the proposition which had been made as to the manner in which he was to be disposed of.

Still he lay, showing no signs of being awake, though he did not intend to allow matters to proceed too far.

He had been artful enough to move his arm in the manner we have described, in order that they might not discover he was feigning sleep, as they might have done had the firelight poured full upon his features.

Now all was shadowy and indistinct.

Probably because they considered he was the most dangerous of the two and the most difficult to capture, Nimble Ned came towards Jonathan Wild with a stealthy step.

In his hand he held a nice piece of strong, thin rope, by the aid of which he hoped to make the villainous thief-taker securely captive.

For this purpose he stooped down, and was in the act of gently slipping the noose over Wild's head, when, with a shout, the thief-taker started up and clutched him by the throat.

"What are you at, you villain?" he cried.

Then, as he pretended to notice for the first time the threatening countenances of the coiners, he asked:

"After telling me I was welcome, would you murder me in my sleep?"

Strive how they would, the coiners could not shake off the fear which settled upon them as soon as ever they found that Jonathan was awake.

His name had so long been such a dread to them that it was no wonder they should shrink from him with awe and apprehension.

Nimble Ned, who was perhaps as courageous as any of the band, dropped the rope and allowed his arms to hang listlessly by his side, not making the slightest attempt to free himself from the grip that Wild had taken upon his throat.

The thief-taker, however, released him quickly, and with the rapidity of thought drew his sword from its sheath.

At the same time that he did this, he kicked Noakes violently with his foot, as he exclaimed:

"Get up!—get up! Defend yourself, or you are a dead man!"

With a scream of terror, the Governor of Newgate sprang to his feet, as though suddenly set in motion by a galvanic shock.

As if by instinct, he drew his sword, and then, dizzy and bewildered, he glared about him, being at first quite unable to decide whether he was dead or alive.

Being in this state of doubt, it was strange to see how he shrank back from the glowing furnace.

Wild saw in a second what an impression he had made, and he hastened to deepen it.

With increased fierceness of tone and violence of gesture, he exclaimed:

"What is it you want? Will nothing satisfy you but my life? If so, come upon me all at once, and those who can may slay me! I don't fear you all, and should not were your numbers double what they are!"

The determined, resolute tone in which these words were uttered did not by any means tend to raise the courage of the coiners.

An attack upon Wild now that he was armed and fully on his guard was a different thing to creeping to him while he slept and binding him with cords.

Their minds were all filled at the same moment with the same regret, which was that they had not taken the opportunity afforded them of sheathing a knife in his heart.

"Speak!" said Wild. "What is it you require?—what is it you demand at my hands? Have I not acted fair and square and aboveboard with you?"

"You have not!" said one of the coiners. "We know you—you are Jonathan Wild!"

"And if I am," replied the thief-taker, ferociously, "you ought to know the consequences of making any attack upon me! You would have found that it would have answered your purpose well to have remained good friends with me. This place would have afforded me excellent concealment, and never fear that I should have failed to pay you liberally for the accommodation!"

Hearing these words, the coiners began to wonder whether, after all, they had not made a mistake.

To all of them came the conviction that it would have been their best policy to have temporised and kept friends with Jonathan Wild.

"That is at an end now," continued the thief-taker. "I regret it, and so will you. I have given up all my booty to you,—keep it; but I shall leave this place at once! I tell you again, I don't fear you, and care not what you may try to do!"

With some greater show of courage than they had yet displayed, the coiners placed themselves before the door communicating with the passage leading to the hut.

Wild no sooner perceived their menacing attitude than he laughed derisively.

"You know our secret," said one of the coiners, "and our secret is our life!"

Wild laughed again.

"After what has happened, you won't rest until you have had revenge! Don't deny it, for your character is too well known, and the wolf doesn't change his nature!"

"If you attempt to detain me, it will be at the peril of your lives! I will cut my way through the whole crew of you!"

The resolute, courageous bearing that Wild continued to maintain made a deeper and deeper effect upon the coiners.

In their own minds they did not doubt that he fully and entirely meant what he said.

It is true that if they mustered up their resolution they might have succeeded in overpowering him.

In this process some lives must inevitably be lost, while others would be placed in the greatest jeopardy; and though they all wished that Wild should be slain or made prisoner, they could not bring themselves to relish that job being achieved for the general good by the sacrifice of their own lives.

Thus it was, then, that Jonathan Wild was able to keep them at bay.

"Stand aside," he cried, "and let me pass in peace! I don't want to harm you needlessly, for I owe my life to having found a refuge in this place! Stand aside—let me pass, and we will ride far away from this spot, never to return to it again, nor breathe a single syllable respecting its existence! If you refuse, I will cut my path through you with my sword, and, upon gaining the open air, will do my worst! Decide quickly which you will do! I would not hesitate and dally with you thus were it not for my wounded comrade! Stand aside once more, and suffer us to depart!"

CHAPTER DXXXVII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS ATTACK JONATHAN WILD AND THE COINERS IN THE CAVERN.

THERE can be no question that Jonathan Wild fully expected that the coiners would stand aside from the door, and allow him to take his departure.

He was just felicitating himself upon the favourable turn affairs had taken and the prospect there was of making his escape.

Ere he was another moment older, however, he was forcibly reminded of the truth of the proverb which warns us not to "holloa till we are out of the wood."

He had seized his trembling companion by the arm, and had advanced a step.

The coiners wavered and seemed inclined to allow them to pass by, when, with a sudden and unexpected dash, the officers came against the door.

The utmost consternation now prevailed in the subterranean apartment.

The coiners were frightened to death, for they knew that at length all was discovered.

Jonathan Wild even felt a momentary alarm, but, banishing the feeling, he looked all around him so as to be prepared for the worst.

As for Mr. Noakes, he trembled so excessively that he was in imminent danger of falling to the ground.

His teeth chattered, and his sword rattled in his grasp.

He was, however, in a much better bodily condition than could have been expected.

We have before stated that his wound was of a trifling character, and short as was the time that had elapsed since he had received it, and although he had lost such a fearful quantity of blood, yet, owing to the rest and the stimulants that he had taken in such large quantities, he was now in readiness to exert all his physical powers.

He was weak, yet scarcely any weaker than he was before he received his wound.

How long this new-found strength would last remains to be seen.

The coiners were so terrified that they ran hither and thither, from side to side, not knowing what to do.

They were paralysed by the unexpectedness of the attack.

Without scarcely any intermission, the officers renewed their assault upon the door, which gave away completely before them.

Just as it fell, the thief-taker noticed on the other side of the furnace a kind of thick curtain, which covered a space in the wall of the apartment.

By the mere instinct of desperation, Wild rushed towards it, dragging Mr. Noakes behind him.

Dashing the curtain on one side, he found himself in a low, rudely-arched passage, leading he knew not where.

The officers were taken by surprise on finding themselves in such a place, opposed to so many more persons than they had expected, and such being the case, they were much in the condition of the sportsman in the well-known fable, who knew not at which birds to take aim.

Recovering from their first shock of astonishment, however, they laid hold of all the persons they possibly could, and almost in the twinkling of an eye made the whole of the coiners prisoners.

It was this favourable diversion of the attention of his enemies that enabled Jonathan Wild to effect his retreat.

The chief officer, however, who was bent upon securing the thief-taker, happened to catch sight of his form as he disappeared behind the curtain.

Running in this direction, he, with one vigorous snatch, pulled it down from its supports, and then the opening in the wall was disclosed.

Uttering a loud cry, and calling to his men to follow him, the chief officer, sword in hand, plunged valiantly into the dark, narrow passage.

It so happened that no immediate attention was paid to his command, for there was no one of his men who was not busily employed.

Mr. Noakes was overpowered by the bewildering nature of these events.

It was only in a mechanical kind of way that he moved his legs and ran as Jonathan dragged him onwards.

"Quick!" cried the latter, in a suppressed voice. "Fortune is our friend, and if we are only speedy we shall yet manage to escape, although such a thing seems hopeless in the extreme! After me, I say! Why do you lag behind? If you falter, it is death!"

"But you must remember I am wounded—I am weak—I cannot run. This exertion is more than I can sustain!"

"Bah! That is nonsense! When a man knows that he is flying for his life, he can do things that seem utterly impossible! Follow me, I say!"

Mr. Noakes still faltered in his steps.

And no wonder.

His brain was clouded and rendered heavy by wine, and spun round and round in a most confusing and agonising manner.

"Hark!" said Wild again. "Will not that put wings to your feet? Listen! We are pursued! Can you not hear footsteps behind us?"

The Governor listened, and responded with a groan.

The sound of rushing footsteps reached him plainly.

"On your speed depends your life!" said Wild, hissing the words fiercely between his teeth. "You must outrun the man who is behind us!"

"I cannot!"

Although he thus proclaimed his inability to make any more exertions, Jonathan Wild continued to drag his companion forward.

It was a frightful thing to run along a passage so dark, so narrow, and so low as that was, and without having the slightest knowledge regarding obstacles that might lie before them.

But impelled by the knowledge that he was flying for his life made Jonathan Wild think nothing of all this.

Suddenly, however, he was brought to a stop, and with a suddenness that was far from pleasant, for it shook almost all the breath out of his body.

He gasped painfully, and Mr. Noakes, closing his eyes, seemed about to fall into a swoon.

On came the footsteps with undiminished speed, and it was quite certain that in a few seconds, at the most, their pursuers would be upon them.

It was while endeavouring to fetch his breath that Wild became aware, by the sound, that only one man was in pursuit of him.

The moment he was sure of this fresh hopes sprang up in his mind.

Even yet he thought he should be able to escape.

With lightning-like rapidity he plunged his hand into the breast of his apparel and drew forth a pistol.

To put it on full-cock and fire along the passage in the direction in which the pursuer was coming, took him but a second.

The report was tremendous.

It was almost like firing down a tube: and the combustion of the gunpowder for a moment illuminated the passage as though by a sudden flash of lightning.

By the aid of that evanescent gleam, Jonathan beheld within a few paces of him the form of a man attired in the costume of a police officer.

It vanished like an apparition, and the darkness in the passage seemed doubly profound.

The last echoes of the shot mingled with an awful groan, as the officer fell headlong to the ground.

Jonathan did not pause, but turned round instantly.

He knew that the report of the firearm, although pro-

ductive of immediate good, would be the means of bringing all the other officers upon him.

Therefore it became imperatively necessary that he should ascertain whether the obstacle which had arrested his progress was insurmountable or not.

If it was, then he had only to stand there with his back against it, and sell his life as dearly as he could.

Not that he imagined that he was in such a desperate predicament as that.

He seemed to know that such a passage would not be created without an object, and almost instantly his hand encountered something cold.

It was a bolt.

With a cry of joy, which he could not repress, the thief-taker drew it from its socket, and then the way was clear before them, for the obstacle was nothing but a door.

Crossing the threshold, and dragging his companion after him, Wild closed the door, and felt about him for some fastening.

Guessing where the centre of the door would be, he stretched out his hand and felt the lock.

But the key was not in it, though he could tell that it was sticking in the other side, for he could feel the end projecting slightly from the upper part of the keyhole.

Despite the danger of doing so, he opened the door quickly and drew the key.

Precious moments, when he ought to have been flying from his foes, were consumed by this operation.

But Wild did not begrudge them.

He could hear his foes running at full speed along the passage.

But now it was in his power to place before them an obstacle which they would not easily break down.

With the quickness of desperation, then, he closed the door, thrust in the key, and locked it.

This done, he felt a far greater assurance of safety, and, catching his companion by the arm, he said:

"Once more all is well, and a little exertion will free us from our foes. I have fastened the door, and before they can break it down, we shall be far from this place. Can you not feel how the fresh air blows upon your face?"

There was a current of air blowing with full force down the passage, which contrasted rather remarkably with the close, pent-up vapour on the other side of the door.

"There's an opening not far off," cried Wild, in encouraging accents. "Come on! Summon up all the strength that you possess! Now is the time to make exertion! Your freedom depends upon yourself!"

Such words as these could not fail to make an impression upon anyone situated as Noakes was.

Had he been ten times as exhausted, ten times as terrified, that would have had the effect of causing him to put forth his greatest efforts.

Along the passage, then, they ran at a speed that was absolutely terrific.

Nevertheless, they had not gone many yards before they heard a succession of hard blows rain upon the door.

They threatened to demolish it if they continued much longer, though Wild had hopes, for when he closed the door, he noticed that it was of unusual weight and thickness.

And, moreover, they were stimulated at every step, for the air became fresher and fresher, and cooler, and they could smell the scent arising from wild flowers.

But the passage grew no higher, no wider, no lighter.

The pure cold air too, entering their lungs, improved the condition of their blood, and made them able to sustain their fatigue better.

Suddenly, they were again brought to a stop, and this time by the soft and yielding earth.

Mr. Noakes, whose strength was utterly spent, sank down in a huddled-up mass.

Jonathan, recovering himself as best he might, felt all around him with his hands.

Nothing but the cold, damp earth, however met his touch.

It was quite certain that the end of the passage had been reached.

How, then, was he to escape?

Whence did the fresh air come which streamed into the passage?

But for this circumstance, Wild would there and then

have succumbed to his foes, but the wind still played upon his heated body, indicating plainly enough that there was an outlet somewhere close at hand.

He was terribly exhausted, and panted frightfully for breath.

For a second, or perhaps more, he stood quite inactive.

He was roused into life by a terrific crash.

The door was down.

Then came upon his ears once more the much-dreaded sound produced by the officers' footsteps, as they ran swiftly along.

A few moments at the most would inevitably bring them to where he stood.

This thought, so far from being productive of despair, inspired him with fresh vigour to finish that which he had so nearly accomplished.

He put his hand suddenly to his head, for he fancied it was there that he felt the cold air most.

He looked up, and saw above his head a small piece of clear blue sky, with one star faintly shining in it.

"Hurrah!" he cried, shaking his companion. "We are free at last! Look up—there is the blue sky! If we are quick, even now all may be well!"

Mr. Noakes had somewhat recovered, and, hoping that the end of this terrible adventure at last was reached, looked up.

When he too caught sight of that little piece of blue sky, his hopes rose.

It was really wonderful to see the startling effect that the sight of such a frequently-seen object gave him.

Feeling with his hands, the thief-taker immediately discovered a projection similar in every respect to those in the wall of the hut above, and by the aid of which the old man had ascended with so much agility and care.

Putting out his hand, he felt another.

With hasty words he explained to his companion the means by which the ascent might be accomplished, and, urged on by hope, Mr. Noakes resolved to climb.

With amazing alacrity Wild climbed up.

It was no more difficult than it would have been to mount a ladder.

Mr. Noakes followed bravely, though he could not keep pace with his more active and muscular companion.

At last Wild reached the top, and then what words could possibly express the astonishment he felt when he found he was in a tree of considerable elevation.

CHAPTER DXXXVII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS SUSTAIN A COMPLETE DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF JONATHAN WILD.

By that good fortune which fell so often to his share, Jonathan Wild had luckily hit upon the secret mode of leaving the coiners' cave, which had been designed and perfected by them with great care, in order that they might avail themselves of it as a last resort if things took a desperate turn.

As their secret might be discovered at any moment, the necessity of having such a means of escape becomes manifest.

With extraordinary labour the passage had been hewn out of the solid earth.

The door was placed some distance within it, and was intended to be a means of baffling their foes in case they should track them so far.

Then the means by which they ascended from this passage to the surface of the earth was most ingeniously contrived.

That it should be discovered by anyone was scarcely possible, for the particular tree which they had made use of for this purpose had nothing suspicious in the look of it.

It may seem strange that Jonathan Wild should have availed himself of this secret passage before the coiners did so.

The reason of this, however, was that, although they considered it quite possible their retreat should be discovered, yet the coiners never anticipated being taken suddenly by surprise.

Their motive for having the old man in the hut above, was that he might be able to give them timely notice of the approach of any danger.

For instance, if the opening in the floor was likely to be



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES CONCEAL THEMSELVES IN THE RUINED BARN.]

found out, or even if enemies in any number came near the spot, it was the old man's duty to place his lips to one end of a tin tube which communicated directly with the cave below.

That extremity of the tube which projected from the wall of the coiners' cave was so shaped that when anyone blew violently down the tube from above, a discordant screech or whistle was produced.

Had this warning been given on the present occasion to the coiners, the officers would not have been so fortunate as they really were.

The furnace would have been extinguished by an apparatus contrived especially for that purpose, and the whole gang would have hastened down the passage, and from thence gained the wood, where they would have dispersed, and then all hopes of capturing them would have been at an end.

That police officers should actually penetrate so far without their knowing anything about it, and that the

first intimation they should receive should be a heavy concussion against the door, was a thought that never once entered their minds.

After the precautions they had taken, they believed that such a thing would be impossible.

Such being the state of affairs, it will be understood that the coiners were completely paralysed by astonishment and terror when the officers broke in upon them.

Of all their elaborate precautions Jonathan Wild knew nothing, and therefore was not so much surprised that the officers should suddenly appear.

Ever prompt in action when the moment of danger came, he had turned round, and readily availed himself of the only means of exit he could perceive.

When he gained the top of the tree, the thief-taker could not avoid resting a moment to admire the ingenuity of the whole contrivance, although his foes were so very close behind him.

He assisted Mr. Noakes, and the pair seated them-

selves upon two stout branches projecting from the trunk.

The circumference of this tree was considerable; but whether it had been made hollow by nature or not, was a difficult point to determine.

It was hollow, however, and that fact appeared to make no difference to the vitality of the tree itself, for several branches extended themselves from it, though they were not so well covered with foliage as trees in a natural condition.

Jonathan dashed the perspiration from his forehead as he said:

"Is not this brave, Noakes—is it not capital? I could never have given those coiners credit for so much ingenuity; and I don't believe that this place is of their own contrivance—I am rather inclined to think that they found it ready made."

"Let us descend!" said Noakes, glancing apprehensively about him, and panting for breath as he spoke. "If we are not quick we shall be overtaken, for the officers will be able to ascend the tree as easily as ourselves."

"Will they?" said Wild.

As he asked this question, there came over his face such a truly diabolical look that Mr. Noakes could not refrain from shuddering.

He averted his eyes.

"I don't think they will, Noakes," he continued. "I shall astonish them a little, I fancy! Jump down—be quick! I will sit here the while!"

This command was quite agreeable to Mr. Noakes.

Taking hold of the bough of the tree with his hands, he lowered himself until he hung the full length of his arms, and then dropped.

"Quick, you villain!" whispered Wild. "Do you see that piece of wood yonder—that portion of the trunk of a tree?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Roll it this way, then, and give it to me!"

"I cannot—I am not strong enough!"

"Try—for if you don't, I will shoot you on the spot!"

Either Mr. Noakes had underrated his strength or else this threat held out by his companion stimulated it, for he began to roll the piece of wood towards the hollow tree with very great expedition.

It was a heavy block, about three feet in length, and rather more than one foot in diameter.

It bore the appearance of being a piece of a tree that had been cut down by a woodman, and then sawn into fragments for the convenience of removal.

"What shall I do with this now?" asked Noakes, as soon as he had rolled the block of wood against the tree.

"Lift it up, and give it to me!" replied Wild.

This looked an impossible feat for the Governor of Newgate to accomplish.

Summoning up all his strength, however, he suddenly raised the huge block in the air, and held it above his head at arms'-length.

He trembled excessively while he did so, and seemed in imminent danger of allowing it to fall upon him.

Wild was in a very awkward position to take hold of this piece of wood; but, nevertheless, he managed to do so.

Nothing but the savage delight which the prospect of injuring the police officers gave him could possibly have endowed him with strength sufficient for this purpose.

His intention was pretty plain.

It was to hurl the heavy block of wood down upon his foes.

He was almost too late, however, and by the time he had got all in readiness one of the police officers was very near to the top of the hollow tree.

Wild just caught sight of this man's upturned face within a few inches of his own, and he uttered the most fearful yell that could be conceived.

The officer was not a little startled by it, and made a momentary pause in his ascent.

That pause was fatal to him.

Down, with a hideous crash, came the block of wood.

Wild flung it down with all the strength he could muster.

In the twinkling of an eye the officer disappeared.

It was impossible that he could withstand the force of such a heavy falling weight.

Indeed, the sharp edge of the wood struck him upon the head and killed him instantly.

In the fall he hurled the other officers down, who were following as closely as they could in his footsteps.

A most dismal succession of yells and screams came from the bottom of the tree.

Wild now was more like a demon than a man, and feeling that his vengeance was yet unglutted, he rapidly produced two pistols and fired them down upon the bruised and bleeding mass below.

Then he shrieked aloud with joy to think that at last he had been successful in so completely triumphing over his foes.

How long he would have remained in the tree giving vent to the exultation that swelled his bosom is hard to say.

He was only recalled to the sense of his position by the voice of his companion in crime.

"Come, Mr. Wild!" he cried, "let us fly! I am very weak and cannot run fast—let us embrace this opportunity to get away!"

There was a great deal of common sense in this proposition, and Wild saw it.

Now that the first flush of demoniac joy had passed away, the reaction came on with great rapidity.

The effects of all the exertion and fatigue he had lately undergone made themselves felt.

He was weak and nerveless.

After one more glance down the hollow tree, by which he assured himself that none of the officers were attempting to ascend, Jonathan dropped to the ground in the same manner as his companion.

"Where shall we go now, Mr. Wild—where shall we go?"

"Out of this wood, at any rate. We must then take a good look around us."

The Governor was evidently well pleased at the prospect of getting out of the wood, which, however pleasant and picturesque in appearance it might have been, would never possess any charms for him.

At a half walk, half trot, the two villains made their way through the trees.

The pace at which they went was one that they could keep up for a great length of time without experiencing much exhaustion, and which had the advantage of taking them over a considerable space of ground in a short time.

Mr. Noakes hung back, allowing his companion to take the lead.

At the first open space he came to, Jonathan looked up at the sky, and after having carefully noted the position of the stars, set forward again, with an appearance of great confidence, in a northerly direction.

"Do you see that star, Noakes?" he exclaimed, pointing to one that could be seen twinkling above the tree tops.

"Yes, I see it."

"Fix your eyes upon it, then, and don't remove them! That's the north pole star, and while that shines in our faces we shall be going in the direction I want to take."

Mr. Noakes attended to this injunction rather too closely, for in his anxiety not to lose sight of the star he did not remove his eyes from it.

Consequently, he missed seeing a rather large stone that lay before him in his path.

He stumbled over it, and fell with great violence to the ground.

Jonathan Wild uttered an oath when the crash reached his ears.

Upon ascertaining how it was that his companion had met with the mishap, he could not refrain from laughing aloud.

The Governor, however, failed to perceive anything amusing in the incident, for he had bruised and shaken himself severely.

With many piteous exclamations, he got upon his feet again, and once more they continued their way through the wood.

But in future Mr. Noakes, though he glanced up at the pole-star now and then, took good care to keep clear of any obstacles that might lie before his feet.

It was a few minutes after this that the palings forming the boundary of the wood were reached.

Mr. Noakes began to feel very tired, and repined bitterly about the loss of the horses.

With this loss Jonathan put up with more equanimity. "Hold your d—d row!" he cried, at length losing all patience as Mr. Noakes continued to pour forth his regrets—"hold your d—d row, I say! You ought to think yourself lucky that you have got off so well! Get over the palings, and take care of the nails on the top!"

The humane proprietor of the wood had caused the top of the fence surrounding it to be thickly studded with nails, so that it was no agreeable task that the two rascals had before them.

By being careful, however, they escaped receiving any serious injury.

They were now in a meadow of considerable extent.

Jonathan's course lay straight across it; but before he ventured to start, he paused for a few moments to listen.

Not a sound to indicate that the officers were in pursuit reached his attentive ear.

He chuckled with satisfaction, for now he made quite sure that their overthrow had been complete.

But as he listened, he heard the wind make a strange, sighing, moaning noise among the trees, the branches of which dashed against each other with a strange, unearthly sound.

"We shall have a storm before long!" he exclaimed, "and a severe one, too!"

This was no very pleasant tidings; but upon looking round, every indication of an approaching storm could be perceived.

The clouds had already piled themselves up to a great height; but during their passage through the wood it had been impossible to take notice of this circumstance.

"We are all right!" cried Wild. "I have done for the villains at last! I do think they have been trouble enough! Come on—follow me across this meadow; we shall have a ducking before we go much further!"

Mr. Noakes buttoned his coat tightly, and followed as rapidly as he could in the footsteps of his companion.

The force of the wind much increased, and the clouds swiftly moved until the whole firmament was completely covered.

The darkness, too, became profound, and, but for the fact that Wild's eyes had already become accustomed to the gloom, he would have been unable to see his way before him in the least degree.

In a little while he found it necessary to moderate his pace, so much darker did it become.

Then came one terrific flash of lightning, which lighted up with flitting brilliancy every object for miles round, imparting to all things a strange and supernatural appearance.

Then came the thunder, in a prolonged, rattling peal.

Before its reverberations died away the clouds seemed suddenly to open, for a perfect and continuous sheet of water poured down upon the earth.

CHAPTER DXXXVIII.

THE TWO FUGITIVES FIND THAT THE BARN IS BY NO MEANS A SAFE PLACE OF REFUGE.

JONATHAN WILD and Mr. Noakes were drenched through to the skin in a moment.

The latter still continued to give utterance to complaints as numerous as they were useless.

"Hold your row!" said Wild, angrily. "We cannot be any wetter than we are now; is there not some consolation in that?"

The Governor disdained to reply.

The lightning flashes now became more and more frequent, and the peals of thunder more terrific and continuous.

But in spite of the elementary war, Jonathan pushed onwards at the best speed he could make.

He was pleased, rather than otherwise, that the storm should have broken out, for he imagined it would serve to keep back his pursuers.

Nothing but this feeling would have enabled him to be proof against the terror he always felt at thunder and lightning.

The rain poured down incessantly, showing no signs of abatement.

At last, when they had got nearly two miles from the wood, Mr. Noakes, with a groan, declared that he could go no further.

Wild uttered a curse; but though he did so, he was not

proof himself against the fatigue of which the other complained.

"You must go on," he cried, "until we can find some place of shelter! It will be ridiculous to stop here!"

"But we may go for miles across the country like this," returned Noakes, "without meeting with a single habitation."

"Wait till the next flash of lightning comes," cried the thief-taker, "and take the opportunity of looking round. Who knows?—we may find a place where we can shelter ourselves from the rain."

There was some hope in this, and the Governor waited for the next flash with much impatience.

At last it came.

It would almost seem that the brightest flash, and the one that endured longest, had been reserved for this occasion.

The blue glare lit up everything with so much brightness as almost to deprive them of the sense of sight.

Nevertheless, they managed to perceive in the distance the outlines of some rude building, but of what character they could not take upon themselves precisely to determine.

The lightning flickered over it for an instant, and then it vanished.

Wild took care to notice the position of this place, and turning his face towards it, he cried:

"Come on, Noakes! Let this place be what it will, we shall be saved from this torrent of water! I confess that I am tired!"

"I am ready to drop!" replied Noakes, dolefully. "If it was not for the prospect of resting soon, I should not be able to advance another step!"

Before they had traversed half the distance intervening between them and the building in question, another flash of lightning lit up the scene.

Again was the building brought suddenly into view, as if by the effect of some enchantment.

On this occasion, as they were nearer, and as they had some idea of what it was they were going to look at, the two villains saw it with much greater distinctness than before.

It was a large, irregular building of red brick, covered with a time-stained thatch.

"That's either a ruined farm-house or a barn," said Wild, when darkness once more prevailed. "Whichever it is does not much matter. It seems to me that it will answer every purpose we require."

They pushed forward rapidly, inspired by the hope of obtaining a speedy rest, and by the time the lightning flashed again they were close to the wall.

The door appeared a little to their left hand, so they groped their way in that direction.

When the door was reached they found that it was not secured in any way, but was hanging loosely on its hinges.

They hesitated a moment before crossing the threshold; but summoning up his courage, Jonathan led the way.

The interior of the building was very much darker than it was outside; in fact, it was impossible to distinguish anything, however near.

Without penetrating into the interior, they stood by the door, just so as to be sheltered from the rain.

The descending rain came with great violence upon the earth, rendering it almost an impossibility to hear even a loud sound.

For all that, Jonathan listened; but, to his satisfaction, he heard nothing of the police officers, and at last began to think that he had baffled them altogether.

"I believe we have done it this time, Noakes," he said, after a pause.

"Done what?"

"Got rid of the officers, of course."

"I hope so—it's quite time."

"Be thankful that you are yet at liberty," said Wild.

"I almost wish I was a prisoner," replied the Governor, gloomily.

"Bah—stuff!"

"I don't like this place."

"But you wanted to come to it."

"I know I did."

"Then, why don't you like it?"

"It is so dark."

Jonathan affected to laugh.

He was frightened at the darkness himself, though he did not like to confess it.

Had not such been the case, he would have penetrated further into the building.

"If you're frightened at the dark," he said, "I will try and make you a little easier in your mind. I don't think we need frighten ourselves about the officers now. Pull the door shut, and I will get a light."

"How?"

"Don't trouble yourself—I will show you; but shut the door first."

Mr. Noakes obeyed, and Jonathan poured a small quantity of gunpowder on to the floor.

Then, taking some paper from his pocket, he placed it on the powder, and poured some more on the top of it.

A spark produced by striking the flint of his pistol against the steel caused the gunpowder to explode.

The paper buried was alight, but the flame was so feeble that it threatened every moment to go out.

By care, Jonathan at last got it to burn fairly and brightly.

Close by, he caught sight of some straw, and he placed this over the flame.

A bright blaze was the result.

It endured for little more than a moment, but yet long enough to enable Wild and the Governor to look well around them, and ascertain the character of the place they were in.

Little more than four rough brick walls met their gaze upon which rested the clumsy contrivance upon which the thatch was laid.

The barn—for such it unquestionably was—bore a most deserted and melancholy aspect.

The bright light shining upon the brickwork showed that it was slimy and glittering with damp.

The beams which crossed and recrossed it were blackened by time, and it was evident that, for some reason or other, a long time had elapsed since it had last been visited.

Cheerless as all these indications would have been to most people, they had an exactly opposite effect upon the thief-taker.

It made him feel all the more confidence in the excellence of the hiding-place he had chosen.

All this he was enabled to see, and then the fire went out.

After the illumination the darkness seemed doubly profound, and both would have been much delighted if they could but have had a fire.

For many reasons, however, this was impossible, chiefly because the light would not fail to draw attention to the spot, and what they had to do was to try their best to avoid discovery.

"This is an old ruined barn," said Wild, turning to his companion.

"It's uncomfortable enough for one."

"Never mind that; I would prefer it any day to the most comfortable cell in all Newgate. It would not be wise to sleep; nevertheless, we can rest ourselves by lying down upon the ground, and if we keep near the door we shall have timely knowledge of the approach of any of our foes."

"I shall be glad enough to lie down," replied Mr. Noakes, and he immediately suited the action to the word.

"You can go to sleep if you like," said Wild; "slumber will do you good. I will keep awake and watch."

"Who could sleep in such a storm as this?"

"That's no affair of mine. I don't intend to try."

The thief-taker threw himself at full length upon the ground, as close as he could to the doorway without being soaked by the rain, which still continued to fall with unabated violence.

While the storm continued to rage as it did then, there was, in reality, little to fear from their foes, who, however ardent they might be to effect a capture, would naturally shrink from exposing themselves to the fury of the elements.

But Wild knew very well that the storm would soon be over.

At length the rain began to fall more gently, and the thunder to peal at longer intervals than before.

Gradually the sky cleared, and as the clouds were

driven over to the windward a beautiful expanse of blue was disclosed.

The moon was at a considerable elevation, and as the air had been purified and cleared by the storm, her beams seemed ten times brighter than usual.

The door of the barn was partly open, and when the beautiful moon shone out in such splendour over the landscape an angry curse came from Jonathan's lips.

Midnight was above all things what he least wished to see.

The country for miles round was beautifully lighted up, and from the doorway of the barn a most enchanting prospect was visible; but the thief-taker closed his eyes to all its beauties.

"I suppose I may expect the officers now!" he growled out. "And if I see them coming, what am I to do? If I attempt to quit this place I shall be seen, and if I remain I shall be discovered."

Wild's situation did indeed seem to be a dangerous one.

That the police officers would make their appearance was very probable.

Those who had not been injured would feel redoubled resentment against the fugitives, and so far from pursuing them from duty or the hope of obtaining the reward, they would now be actuated by the much stronger feeling of revenge.

Still, as he listened, the thief-taker was unable to catch a single alarming sound.

Hope began to take the ascendancy in his breast.

"I will go to the door and have one glance, just to satisfy myself that all's well," he said; "after that I shall be able to lie down in peace."

He rose as he spoke, and stood just within the threshold.

No sooner had he taken up this position than he stepped back.

"D—n their perseverance!" he exclaimed. "Somehow or other they have tracked me thus far! Look!"

There was no occasion for Jonathan to utter this injunction.

No sooner did he catch these alarming words, than the Governor hastened to his feet, and cautiously peeped out.

"It's as light as day!" was his first exclamation, uttered in a tone of despair.

"Of course it is. Can you see them?"

"Yes; and they seem to be coming in a straight line across the meadow to this barn."

"They are!"

"Have they tracked us?"

"It looks like it; and yet I can't think how they have managed to do so."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Noakes, "some vivid flash of lightning betrayed us when we were near this spot."

This was a very likely supposition indeed, and Wild's uneasiness increased.

As usual, Mr. Noakes turned to his companion for advice.

"Curse me if I know what we shall do!" replied the thief-taker. "I'm afraid the game's up at last!"

Mr. Noakes groaned.

"Don't make that dismal noise, you fool, but try to think of some way by which we can get out of this scrape!"

"I can't—I can't! It is better that we should resign ourselves to our fates at once! Surely any death is preferable to the life we have of late been leading!"

"I don't know that," said Wild. "I promise you that I shall not surrender until I am deprived of all hope and all chance of escape!"

"Are we not in that position now?" said Mr. Noakes, in a gloomy voice. "The officers have only one hedge to cross and then they are in the very meadow in which this barn is built. We cannot quit the place unseen, and if we remain we shall be found, for there is no place where we can hide!"

"I don't know that," said Wild. "Whereabouts are the officers now?"

He returned to the door as he spoke.

His enemies he saw at a glance were alarmingly close at hand.

"We have no chance whatever, except that of hiding ourselves."

"But there is no place—this barn is like a shell!"

"That's the worst of it; nevertheless, good or bad, we must find a hiding-place of some sort. We shall have to make haste about it, too!"

"This useless to think of hiding," said Mr. Noakes; "the officers are coming direct to the barn! You may depend that they already know for certain we are here."

"That remains to be seen. The worst hiding-place is better than none."

Although he spoke thus about concealing himself, Jonathan Wild at the time had not the remotest notion as to how it was to be done.

Now that the sky had cleared, and the moon was shining with so much brightness, Jonathan Wild, whose eyes were quite accustomed to the darkness, was able to make out the rude outlines of the interior of the barn.

Glancing upwards, he could just discern the heavy wooden beams of which we have already spoken.

"We might hide up there," he thought. "Who can tell? We might find a place where the woodwork will conceal us from the view of anyone below. All depends whether the officers know for certain that we are here. Even if they do, we shall be better off up there, and we shall have the advantage."

"Prepare to give up," said Noakes—"they are close by now!"

"Hush!" cried the thief-taker—"they will hear you speak! Come this way—I have found a hiding-place at last!"

The blood returned to the Governor's heart as he heard these words, and he hastened to stand by his companion's side, for he was all anxiety and impatience to ascertain the nature of the hiding-place.

"Where is it, Mr. Wild—where is it?" he asked.

"There!" was the reply. "Look up—do you see those beams?"

"Yes."

"Then, I think we may conceal ourselves among them; at any rate, I am going to try. Help me to get up, and then I'll bend down and assist you to follow me."

"It is no good, Mr. Wild—it is no good! You might just as well save your pains!"

CHAPTER DXXXIX.

TO THE CONSTERNATION OF JONATHAN WILD, TWO POLICE OFFICERS ARE LEFT TO KEEP WATCH OVER THE DEAD BODY IN THE RUINED BARN.

"You are a cowardly fool, Noakes!" was the reply. "Place yourself under my orders, and do as I tell you, and all will be well!"

"I always do."

"And do you not find it to your benefit? Now help me up! There, that will do!"

By the aid of his companion, Jonathan succeeded in catching hold of one of the cross-beams.

The grasp with his hands was all that he required. By the exertion of considerable strength and agility, he swung himself astride the beam.

Then, bending down, he lowered one hand, and assisted his companion to place himself by his side.

Very dimly Jonathan could see about him.

Creeping along the beam, he made his way to the place where it rested upon the wall.

Here he stopped, and felt about him for a moment with his hands.

"Hush, Noakes!" he cried—"not a word, for your life! I have found a hiding-place at last!"

"Where?"

"Here—just between the thatch and the wall! If we squeeze ourselves closely against the straw, we shall be perfectly invisible to those below."

"But they know we are here, and will search till they find us."

"How can you be sure of that? Come, conceal yourself as I direct! It is necessary for my own safety that you should do so."

To speak the honest truth, Mr. Noakes did not require much urging to follow the injunctions of his companion.

The top of the wall was of considerable width—at least, it was sufficient to allow a man to lie down at full length, and by pressing close against the thatch in the manner Wild had mentioned, it would be quite possible to remain invisible to any persons below.

To be sure, in the daylight they might have been detected, but it must be remembered that it was now night, and that, in spite of the moonbeams, the interior of the barn was very dark.

Wild and Noakes had only just time to dispose of themselves in this manner when the trampling of feet and the sound of voices reached them distinctly.

The police continued to make for the barn in a direct line, and in less than a moment now they reached the door.

"A light!" said a voice—"we must have a light!"

A cold sweat broke out all over the Governor's body when he heard these words.

A dark lantern was lighted, and then the same voice that had spoken before cried:

"Look sharp, my men! If they are here we shall have them. Two of you remain at this door, and cut them down if they attempt to escape!"

Two officers were posted outside the door of the barn, while the remainder entered.

"This place seems quite empty!" exclaimed the one who carried the lantern, as he waved the light about him.

"There's certainly no one here!"

This was the conviction of all present, for the light of the lantern only revealed the bare brick walls.

"They cannot be hiding here—that's certain! Ah! what's that?"

The officer who spoke pointed to a heap of rubbish in one corner.

"Bring the light, and let us see."

The light was brought, but it showed nothing more than that in one corner of the building was an accumulation of rubbish of every imaginable description.

"They may be hidden in that," said one.

"We will soon find out if they are," said the one who issued the instructions.

Speaking these words, he plunged his sword several times into the heap, but without producing any result.

"They are not there," he said; "and yet, take the light. Does not that look like a piece of cloth?"

The officer pointed to something that was sticking up from the heap.

"It is not cloth, sir," said the one with the lantern.

"What is it, then?"

"It looks to me like a part of a shawl, or something of that kind."

The curiosity of the officers was immediately excited by this circumstance, and they all gathered themselves round the mass of rubbish.

Every little discovery, no matter how trifling and unimportant it seemed, might lead to important results.

The fragment of apparel was dragged forth and examined more closely by the aid of the lantern.

"It is a piece of a shawl—that is quite certain," said the officer; "and it's new, too. It has not been among that rubbish very long. Pull the heap to pieces. We may find something now well worth our trouble."

By means of their swords, the police officers easily demolished the heap of rubbish by scattering it about the floor of the barn.

"Hallo!" cried one suddenly, in a voice that showed he was considerably startled. "Why, here's somebody's head!"

A beam of light was at once directed upon this object, and then it became evident that the officer had spoken the truth.

Lying upon the top of the rubbish that remained was a human head.

The hair, which was long and flowing, was matted together with blood, and indeed presented so horrible an appearance that we are unable to describe it.

Familiar as they were with terrible sights, the officers were quite appalled by this unlooked-for discovery.

Before them was the ghastly, indubitable evidence of the perpetration of a foul murder.

"Don't stand stock-still like that!" cried the officer assuming an angriness which he did not feel, in order that he might thereby conceal his own discomfiture—"don't stand stock-still like that, I say!"

"There's been murder done here, sir!" said one.

"It looks like it. Remove the head carefully, and then search further among the rubbish."

This was a task that the officers did not seem to relish at all.

Not one ventured to move, but occupied themselves in glancing at their commander.

"Do you hear my orders?" he cried. "You, Johnson, move the head, and take charge of it."

It appeared that Johnson was the name of the officer who happened to stand nearest.

He did not dare to disobey the commands of his superior, though he would gladly have done so.

Advancing a couple of paces, he gently moved the repulsive-looking object, and as he did so, he said:

"It's a woman's head!"

"What does it matter whether it's a man's head or a woman's? You seem all of you to be as frightened as though you were children. Turn the heap over, I say!"

This was done without any more ado, and in less than a moment the trunk was found.

It bore no marks of mutilation, and, so far as could be seen at present, death seemed to have resulted from the severance of the head from the body.

There was every indication, too, that the unnatural deed had been committed recently.

"It's a murder, safe enough!" said the chief officer. "I didn't think to make such a discovery as this when I entered the place; but certainly it seems just suited to the commission of such a crime."

To this all agreed, and such was the intense interest excited by the affair that, for a little while, they were forgetful of the object which had brought them there at all.

The one in command was the first to recollect himself, and he said:

"We have made discoveries enough for the present. Let the rest be until daylight—to-morrow. By searching carefully about, we shall probably find something that will enable us to identify the murderer."

"What shall we do next, sir?" asked one. "It seems pretty certain that those we are in search of have not taken up their quarters here."

"Assuredly they would not do so," was the reply, "if they had any idea of this. Have you searched well about?"

"Yes, sir; but it is so confoundingly dark, and the place is full of odd nooks and corners."

"Well, some one must remain here and watch the body, so as to prevent anything being disturbed, while we will go on with our search."

For this announcement the police officers were quite prepared, since it was part of the usual routine of duty.

But if the task of simply moving the head was so disagreeable to them, how much more so must be the prospect of sitting during the remainder of the night keeping watch over the murdered remains.

They all looked in each other's faces doubtfully, each hoping in his heart that he should not be chosen for the duty.

The one in command perceived the irresolution, and knew the cause of it, so he at once proceeded to put an end to the affair.

"You, Johnson," he said, "since you have already removed the head, had better remain on guard. You understand what you are to do?"

Johnson was silent.

"You will stay here," continued the officer, in a louder tone of voice, "and see that no one touches this body or anything in the barn. In the morning you shall be relieved."

Johnson looked sullen and unwilling enough, but he was obliged to submit.

The others then moved off, in order to search the barn more thoroughly than they had yet done.

Somehow or other they did not seem very well disposed for this service. Perhaps they shrank from exploring the gloomy recesses of the building from the fear that they might make some other unpleasant discovery when they least expected it.

They searched all round the walls, and directed the beams of the lantern up among the timber supporting the roof, but they failed to catch sight of Wild and Mr. Noakes in their capital hiding-place.

"It is perfectly certain that they are not here," said the commanding officer at length, in a tone of decision. "We must look further afield."

"Are you going to leave me here by myself, sir?" asked Johnson, seeing that they were about to depart.

"You are not afraid, are you?"

"Well, no, sir—not exactly that. Nobody could say that of me."

"What do you want, then?"

"Shall you not leave me with a light?"

"You have your own lantern, have you not, and the means about you of igniting it?"

Johnson was confused and silent, for in the alarm he felt he forgot all about having a lantern.

"I have got my own lantern, sir, of course, only I didn't know whether it was agreeable to you, sir, or not for me to light it."

"Oh yes—you can light it! You can make a fire, if you like, or do anything else in reason, only you must not move that body, or allow anyone else to touch it even."

"Very good, sir! I know my duty, and I will try to do my best to perform it properly."

"That's right! Good night!"

"But, sir—"

"What now?"

"I take it very hard to be kept here all by myself in this place, for of course I am done out of all chance of obtaining my share of the reward."

"I can't help that. Somebody must stay."

"I know that."

"Very well, then, and we may not catch Jonathan Wild after all."

Johnson did not say so, but he fervently wished that they might not.

"Don't be a fool, Johnson!" said the officer; "and mind that you keep things perfectly right; if you don't you will find yourself in trouble."

"I would much rather have a witness that all's straightforward and proper on my part."

"I can trust to you."

"But then I think it is not right to put one man to a duty of this sort."

"Well, if you are frightened, Johnson, some one shall stay with you."

Up to that minute Johnson's companions had been enjoying their comrade's position immensely, and congratulating themselves that they had been so fortunate as not to be chosen.

Now their countenances changed.

The officer glanced at them, and fixed his eyes on the one who seemed least desirous to stop.

He determined to make him, not only for the mere fun of the thing, but because he only wanted to have with him in his expedition after Wild and Noakes courageous, well-trying men.

"Baker!" he cried.

"Y—yes, sir!"

"You will stop with Johnson and bear him company till morning. Go on with you!"

Baker had not heart to attempt to make any remonstrances, but sulkily obeyed.

Finding that some one was about to share his solitude made a wonderful difference to Johnson.

He brightened up exceedingly, and lighted his lantern.

The other officers then moved off once more, in the hope of being able once more to get upon the track of the notorious thief-taker.

As it was quite impossible for them to do this, there could be little or no interest in detailing their proceedings, and so we will confine ourselves with what took place in the barn.

Johnson sat himself down on the ground with his back to the body, and placed the lantern close by his side, with the door open, so that the beams might be diffused over as large a space as possible.

"Come on, Baker, old fellow!" he said. "Sit down! Let us make ourselves as comfortable as we can! It's no good being miserable! Come along, old boy, and sit down!"

"You be d—d!" growled Baker.

"Now, don't make things unpleasant!" continued Johnson. "Why don't you resign yourself to circumstances, like I do? I always make up my mind to be as comfortable as I can!"

"It's d—d easy for you to talk like that, you cowardly sneak!" rejoined Baker. "You are all right now, of

course. You were frightened to stop by yourself, and now you've got somebody with you you don't care!"

"It's the way of the world!" said Johnson, philosophically. "It's no good being ill-tempered. I might just as well be one to grumble and growl myself, but I don't."

"Well, I ain't going to make matters pleasant with you—that's flat! for I'm blowed if I should like to sit with my back to a dead body like you are! How do you know but what it might come to life again, or something?"

"Pooh—pooh! Baker, you are a fool! What harm can there be in sitting with your back to it? It's better than your face; and how could anybody come to life again after their head was off?—just answer me that!"

Although he spoke thus, Mr. Johnson took care to change his position, so that his side was turned to the corpse.

"Oh, it's no concern of mine," growled Baker, pacing up and down. "I only said what I shouldn't like to do. If there's one thing I do hate, it's dead bodies!"

"So do I."

"Give me a live man or a live woman," said Baker, "and I don't care a pin's head; but when it comes to bones and meat it's horrid, and I can't stand it!"

"Don't talk in that awful way!" ejaculated Johnson, in a trembling voice. "It's enough to make anybody's flesh crawl up and down on their bones!"

"You be d—d!" retorted Baker. "You got me here, and I shall say what the devil I like!"

CHAPTER DXL.

RELATES THE EXTRAORDINARY EVENTS WHICH TOOK PLACE IN THE RUINED BARN.

BAKER uttered these words in a tone of voice that plainly enough implied that he had made up his mind to say as many disagreeable things as he possibly could.

Johnson, however, having effected his purpose, exerted himself to get his companion in a better humour.

"Now, I say, Baker," he cried, "don't make things so disagreeable. You're in for it!"

"Yes—thanks to you!"

"We have been good friends hitherto," continued Johnson, "and I hope that this little affair won't make any difference to the good feeling between us."

"Oh, hold your d—d row!" exclaimed Baker, still unappeased, and striding up and down as he spoke.

"But won't it be pleasanter to talk than be silent?" asked Johnson.

"What can we talk about, I should like to know? You must be uncommonly fond of cold meat to keep so close to it as you do!"

"Don't—don't!" cried Johnson. "Keep your mouth shut if you can't say anything else but that!"

"I will be even with you for this!" said Baker. "I will wait my time, and I will have you!"

"That isn't right of you."

"Yes, it is. Who the devil would like such a job as this?"

"I don't like it."

"But you might have put up with it, and not insist upon my losing my share of the reward."

"It isn't right of you to blame me. I didn't pick you out, Baker. I didn't say, 'Can Baker stop with me?' How could I help your being chosen? It might just as well have been some one else."

"And a d—d deal better, I should think!"

"I have got as much cause to grumble as you have, Baker. Come here, Baker, old fellow, and sit down, and let us make an end of our differences!"

"Shan't!"

Johnson uttered a sigh, and began fumbling about in his coat pocket in rather a furious manner.

He was evidently trying to pull something out of a pocket in the skirts of his coat, which fitted very tightly.

The light of the lamp shining upon this object as he tugged away to get at it showed that it was a brown stone bottle with a cork in it.

From the exertion required to pull this bottle out, it was evident that much difficulty must have been found in thrusting it into it.

Having nothing better to do, Baker, while pacing up and down, occasionally gave a glance at his companion,

to see what he was about, and presently he became interested—so much so, that his countenance began to assume quite a mollified expression.

A grin of satisfaction announced the completion of Johnson's efforts to pull the bottle out of his pocket.

From its size, it was capable of containing considerably more than a quart, and Baker, as he glanced at it—though he pretended not to do so—considered it delightfully suggestive of spirits.

"It's a jolly cold night, Baker!" said Johnson, moving away from the dead body.

"I don't know whether I have got any feet in my shoes or not!" was Baker's expressive reply.

"Ah! it is cold; and the worst of it is my clothes ain't half dry, although we did take shelter from the rain! How are you off in that respect, Baker?"

"Oh, don't bother!"

"Very well—just as you like! Keep up being disagreeable if you prefer it! Perhaps, though, just for curiosity sake, you'd like to know what I was going to say, wouldn't you?"

Baker uttered a growl, and left Johnson to interpret it either as an affirmative or as a negative, whichever he thought proper.

"I was going to say, then, Baker, that if you were as badly off from the wet and cold, and one uncomfortable thing and another, as I am, I'd ask you to have a pull at this bottle of old Jamaiky—it's prime, it is! Talk about fires! why, what's the good of a fire to keep you warm, I should like to know, when you happen to have a bottle of old Jamaiky like this to swig at? I look towards you, Baker—here's your very good health!" whereupon Johnson put the stone bottle to his lips.

A gurgling sound followed, which made his companion's mouth water.

"Oh, my eyes!" said Johnson, at length removing the bottle and smacking his lips—"that's the sort of stuff, and no gammon! Why, dear me, I feel all over as warm as a toast!"

Baker made no reply.

He waited with the hope that his companion would renew his invitation.

He was too proud to give way and ask, but he resolved not to refuse a second time.

"You do look miserable, Baker, and that's a fact!" exclaimed Johnson, after a lengthy pause. "I can't bear to see you so down in the mouth and so wretched, while I feel so uncommonly jolly. Now, just try a drop o' this, will you?—it's prime."

"Well, I don't mind if I do," said Baker, with assumed reluctance. "I must resign myself to stopping here, I suppose. I don't see why I should turn up my nose at a drop of good rum."

"Them's my sentiments to a hair!" exclaimed Johnson, emphatically.

Without more ado, Baker seated himself by the side of his companion, and took the stone bottle from his hands.

"You always were a good sort of a fellow, Johnson, and many's the time I said it! I said some hard things a little while back—but forget and forgive, you know!"

"Exactly! Take a good pull—don't be afraid!"

"I won't. Here's to your good health, Johnson, old boy, and here's hopin' that somebody else'll relieve us before long!"

"Hear, hear!"

Baker placed the bottle to his lips, and allowed the fiery contents to trickle down his throat.

Before he had half satisfied himself, or, as he afterwards expressed himself, before he had well got the taste in his mouth, the profound silence that prevailed in the barn whenever the two officers ceased speaking was broken by a low, deep groan of a most unearthly character.

Where it came from was hard to say.

It seemed to fill the whole interior of the building, and then to die away with a dismal cadence.

During the continuance of this horrible sound, the two officers sat still and rigid as though changed to stone.

Baker still held the bottle to his lips; but he could not swallow, and the spirit trickled down his neck.

As soon as the groan died away, he started up with a loud yell issuing from his lips.

In his confusion and terror he dropped the bottle, which

falling on the hard floor of the barn, was immediately broken into fragments, and the precious liquor was completely lost.

Johnson, too, sprang to his feet, but he was so frightened that his legs refused to sustain his weight, so down he went again at full length on his face.

In his fall he overturned the lantern, which, rolling away for a yard or two, became extinguished.

A most profound darkness now reigned in the barn.

Baker, although trembling all over, managed to stand.

But another groan, of a character similar to the first, only rendered ten times more horrible by the darkness, came upon his ears.

The partially-closed door was not far off, and he made a desperate rush towards it, in the hope of getting clear of the building.

But he caught his foot with great violence against the prostrate form of his companion, and down he went with a crash.

He was so terrified that he could not tell what it was he had tumbled over—he only knew that it was something soft.

The next thought that occurred to him was that it was the headless body; and while this horrible idea completely filled his mind, he felt himself suddenly seized with a dreadful clutch.

That it might be his companion never once occurred to him.

But instead, he made sure it was the headless body of the murdered woman which had seized him.

Surely if any thought was enough to drive him into madness that one was, and he struggled and fought like a maniac.

But the more he struggled, the tighter the grasp seemed to be. Endowed with terror with twice his usual strength, Baker still got closer to the door, dragging after him what he was firmly persuaded was the dead body.

At length he got near enough to the door to be within the sphere of the moon's rays, which still continued to pour down upon the earth with undiminished brightness.

So terrified was he, however, and so convinced that his horrible surmise was correct, that he did not dare turn his eyes in the direction of the object he was dragging after him.

The next moment, however, and when his alarm had reached its highest pitch, he heard a voice say:

"Oh, Baker—Baker, is that you?"

The voice was close at hand, and, of course, in a moment he recognised it as that of his companion, Johnson.

This encouraged him to turn round, and then the first glance showed him how needlessly he had terrified himself.

It was his companion who was clinging to him in such a frantic manner, and not the dead body.

The reaction came at once.

"Let go, you d—d fool!" he roared. "What the devil did you lay hold of me in that way for?"

As Johnson neglected immediately to comply with this demand, Baker raised his foot, and gave his companion a sharp kick.

With a cry of pain, Johnson released his hold, and Baker bounded out into the moonlight like a shot.

Grimacing now with pain as well as terror, Johnson followed him with all the speed he was able to make.

The cold night air revived both considerably, and, after a moment's reflection, Baker came to the conclusion that the groan he had heard had been uttered by Johnson with the view of terrifying him.

What led him to this supposition probably was the fact of his having found his companion clinging to him.

Throwing off his terror in a moment, Baker turned round and said:

"What an ass you must be to play me such a trick as that!"

"Trick as what?" asked Johnson.

"You know d—d well what trick I mean! However, you have not got off quite so easily as you perhaps thought you should! I rather think the bottle's broke, or if it ain't, all the rum's run out by this time, and how do you feel after that little salute with my boot, eh? Don't you think you deserve it?"

"I think you're a d—d fool," retorted Johnson, "and don't know what you're talking about! What did you

want to make that hideous row for, while we were drinking? I thought it was a groan!"

This attempt to put the blame on his shoulders made Baker in a furious passion.

"You'll find it won't do to play tricks with me, Mr. Johnson. I know you're fond of a practical joke, but you should be careful who you try them on with!"

"What are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about. Why couldn't you let me drink my drop in peace, after I'd agreed to forgive you for your last scurvy trick, eh?"

"How did I hinder you?"

"Why, by groaning in the way you did."

"I didn't!"

"Now, don't deny it. I've two minds now to pull off my coat and slip into you, and I'll do it, too, if you say you didn't groan again!"

"Well, but, Baker, do listen to reason!"

"Reason be d—d!"

"Then, of course, I'd better shut up. I wonder where my lantern is gone!"

"You'd better go and look. I'm not going to trouble about you any further, that's flat! I'm off at all risks, and you can mind the barn now by yourself!"

"No—no, Baker, don't go—pray don't go!" said Johnson, appealingly. "Don't go and leave me here all by myself!"

"I tell you I shall! When you get a good companion you don't know how to treat him, so I'm off, I tell you!"

"But think of the consequences!"

"Oh! d—n the consequences!"

With these words, Baker struck the top of his hat a heavy blow, in order to fix it more firmly on his head, and with such good effect that the brim came quite down to the bridge of his nose.

Then, in spite of the remonstrances of his companion, away he went across the meadow as fast as ever his legs could carry him.

Johnson shouted after him until he was hoarse, and then he felt more than half inclined to follow his example.

But he could not forget that he had been left there upon a serious business, and he knew that if anything happened to the dead body, he would be held responsible.

Nor was he inclined to be heedless of all future consequences, for he had been in the service for a length of time, and was looking forward to promotion, while Baker was comparatively a new hand.

Therefore, in a state of mind which cannot by any possibility be conceived, Johnson remained outside the barn, gesticulating in such a manner that had he been seen by anyone he would have been taken for a madman.

"I will keep watch," at last he muttered, with chattering teeth. "It shall never be said that Johnson forgot his duty and deserted his post! I will watch, but it shall be outside. Oh, if morning would only come, how glad I should be! And what a d—d fool Baker must have been to have dropped the bottle! All the Jamaiky's gone, I'll wager my life! Oh, if I only had a little drop! I do think I could manage it!"

CHAPTER DXLI.

IN WHICH THE OFFICERS SUCCEED IN EFFECTING A CAPTURE.

JOHNSON glanced uneasily about him, but, true to his determination, stood close to the door of the barn.

But the rum kept making a deeper and deeper impression on his mind the more he thought of it, and at last to such a pitch did it carry him that he murmured aloud:

"If—if I could only go in now and see! Maybe there really is a little drop left—there might be; and if it was a spoonful, how I should enjoy it, to be sure! I never thought that old Jamaiky was half so good, and to think that I should have lost a whole quart of it, after only taking one sip myself! Oh, d—n Baker! I wish he'd never ha' stopped!"

The officer, was silent again, but not for long.

He could not banish the thought of the rum from his mind, and every moment he felt more and more tempted to run the risk of entering the barn again.

"I wonder what that groan was, now?" he asked himself. "Perhaps it was only Baker trying to frighten me; but then I can't bear a dead body. And yet, how could



[JONATHAN WILD IS ATTACKED BY THE TRAVELLER.]

a woman groan after her head was off? It must ha' been Baker. Anyhow, whether it was him or whether it wasn't, I'd ha' gone in if I'd only had my lantern with me. D—n Baker! He's not only spilt my rum, but put my lantern out as well, and kicked it nobody knows where!"

Johnson shook his head, and came to the conclusion that he was a deeply-grieved person indeed, and that Baker was neither more nor less than an atrocious monster.

"It seems quiet enough," he ejaculated, at length. "I don't hear any groans now. I do believe it was Baker! I'd go in now without the lantern, if I could only make sure there was ever such a little drop of old Jamaiky left,—d—d if I wouldn't!"

It would have been a very aggravating thing for the officer to have made his way back into the ruined barn again, and then been unable to find a single drop of rum to reward him for his trouble; but his only chance was to go in and take the risk.

No. 115.—BLUESKIN.

This was what he evidently wished to do, and a fresh thought occurring to his mind, made him resolve upon it.

"If I could only have one drop of that dear old Jamaiky, I wouldn't care! It 'ould make me so comfortable that I could stop here all night, and then, when they came here in the morning, and found me all by myself, wouldn't Baker be in for it?—and shouldn't I be able to crow over him? Rather! Oh, I should, there's no mistake about that! Why, it will be almost as refreshing as a drop of the old Jamaiky!"

Johnson rubbed his hands together, and, as his terror was rapidly subsiding, he really felt quite pleased.

"Oh lord!" he said—"I can picture them all now! Of course, they'll come in the morning. It will be light then, and I shall be sitting down in the barn—for I don't care for dead bodies by daylight—and they'll come in, and I shall get up, and they'll say, 'Is it all right, Johnson—no disturbance?' 'All right, sir,' I shall say—'everything's here just as you left it.' And then they'll look round,

and they'll say, 'Where's Baker?' Then won't I try if I can put him in for a good thing? What shall I say? I think the first thing I'll say will be that he was frightened to stop, and ran away. I shall turn that matter over in my mind. Perhaps I shall think of an answer by morning, and when they find Baker, won't he look more like a fool than ever he did in his life before?"

Johnson rubbed his hands more briskly, and his whole countenance shone with anticipated delight to be derived from Baker's discomfiture.

"If I'd only got a drop of that Jamaiky to start with," he said, "I would make sure of promotion then. And as for Baker, he'd be nowhere! If I'd got a drop of Jamaiky, d—n me if I wouldn't go in the barn again, and sit down where I was before, and keep watch! I'd try to find the lantern; and if I couldn't, why, d—n me, I'd sit down in the dark!"

Higher and higher rose Johnson's valour, but still he had not yet reached the point required to make him enter the barn.

In order to screw up his courage, he had to go through several processes.

First of all, he blew his nose in a very defiant and trumpet-like manner.

Then he fixed his hat firmly on his head, and buttoned his coat up close to the throat.

All these were intended to be outward and visible signs of the amount of determination within.

"Now I will go," he said. "My old grandmother always said that, let things happen how they would, they always turned out for the best in the end. It's mighty hard to see it sometimes, but I believe in it now, and I shall always say the same thing myself. Now, who would have guessed the consequences? I shall be able to make sure of getting that promotion which I have been working hard for for the last fifteen years. To-morrow will see me a happy man. Here goes to keep watch, and now I feel that I don't care a d—n whether I can find the lantern or have a drop of old Jamaiky or not—no, I don't, but I'd rather. However, here goes!"

All this time, Johnson had kept his back to the door of the barn, close to which he stood.

But as he uttered these last words, he turned round very suddenly upon his heels, in order that his courage should not have time to evaporate.

He was about to make a speedy rush into the barn, possibly for the self-same reason, when all at once he stopped, and an unearthly, gasping shriek came from his throat.

His eyeballs glared, and his hair fairly stood on end, notwithstanding the tightness with which he had fixed his hat on his head.

During the time he was giving utterance to the shriek, he stood fixed and immovable close to the threshold of the barn door, in an attitude of the utmost fright.

But as soon as the sound ceased, he turned round and darted away with the speed of a hunted hare, although his knees knocked together in a manner that threatened every moment to bring him to the ground.

A horrible sight had met his eyes when he was about to rush into the barn.

Standing just on the other side of the threshold, and fully revealed by the rays of the moon, which shone upon it with a ghastly and hideous glare, was the body of the woman that he had been appointed to watch over.

It had a horribly lifelike appearance, and it seemed as though the headless trunk was about to rush forth and seize him, while at the same time another low, unearthly groan, similar in cadence to that which had so startled and frightened himself and his companion, came again upon his ears.

Who can wonder that, coming thus upon such an unexpected and frightful sight, the officer should first have been terrified by fear, and then have darted away from the spot as though pursued by a legion of demons?

He was perfectly blind to everything in his path, and rushed on at random.

Coming to a ditch, he fell into it, and was in an instant covered with mud and slime, and drenched to the skin.

Extreme fear, however, made him scramble up and force his way through the prickly hedge beyond, and regardless of the havoc the thorny points made in his skin and his apparel.

The truth of the old proverb which warns us not "to

reckon our chickens before they are hatched," was forcibly manifested in the case of Johnson, the police officer.

He counted a little too surely upon what was going to happen, never dreaming that anything could happen to cause him to quit his post with so much abruptness.

On he went across another meadow, and then he heard a tremendous shout.

He almost fancied it was a call to stop, but he never for a moment dreamt of obeying any such command.

On the contrary, he increased his speed, and flew over the grass at an amazing rate.

In a very little while, however, there came upon his ears another sound, which alarmed him more than ever.

This was neither more nor less than the hasty tramping of feet.

Never doubting but that he was pursued by the horrible headless figure he had seen on the threshold of the barn, the officer did not think it worth his while to turn his head, but ran madly on.

Conveniently across his path lay a fallen tree, which had been struck by the lightning during the late storm, and violently pulled up by the roots.

There it lay, a charred and splintered fragment of wood.

Still blind to everything in his path, Johnson ran on as though his life depended upon his reaching that tree in the smallest possible amount of time.

Coming upon it suddenly, he struck his feet against it with a violence that can scarcely be imagined.

Away he went, head first, shooting over the slippery grass as though he had been suddenly projected from a mortar.

Before he could fairly stop himself, and certainly before he was conscious of the accident that had befallen him, he was seized by his pursuers.

These consisted of the other members of the troop to which he belonged.

Failing altogether to find the least trace of Jonathan Wild anywhere in the vicinity, the one who had the command ordered the chase to be abandoned.

Not, however, until he had thoroughly satisfied himself that there was no chance of capturing the fugitives.

He then gave the order to return to the barn with all possible speed, in order that they should make a closer search in it than they had hitherto done, for the impression on his mind was that those he sought were somewhere concealed in it.

It was while on their way to the barn that they saw the figure of a man running at full speed across a meadow.

Finding that no notice was taken of their order to stop, except that the man ran rather faster than before, they gave immediate chase, which terminated in the manner we have just described.

They recognised their companion at a glance.

By the time they had placed him on his feet, the chief officer arrived.

"Who have we here?" he asked.

"Johnson, sir."

"Johnson?" he echoed, in tones of surprise, and scarcely able to believe his ears. "Impossible!"

"Look for yourself, sir," said one of the officers, who kept Johnson prisoner.

"Turn him round to the light, then."

This was done.

The recognition was then instantaneous, and the chief officer said, with a start of astonishment:

"Johnson, what the devil brings you here?"

In reply, the terrified police officer rolled his eyes wildly, and nodded his head.

"Keep him safe prisoner!" said the chief officer.

"Now, then, give an explanation, will you?"

Johnson certainly did try very hard to speak, but all his efforts went for nothing.

He couldn't conquer his terror, do what he would; and even if he had been able to use his voice, it is doubtful whether he could have explained properly what he had seen.

"Excuse me, sir," said one of the officers who held him by the sleeve and collar of his coat—"excuse me, sir, but—"

"Go on—why do you hesitate?"

"Well, sir, I rather think Johnson's drunk, 'cause why? he smells of rum."

"Oh, yes, he's drunk—I can see that plain enough!" replied the officer, as soon as this suggestion was started. "Put a pair of handcuffs on him, and bring him along to the barn—we can't afford to lose our time by stopping here!"

This order was carried out without the least compunction on the part of Johnson's brother officers.

On the contrary, they rather rejoiced in it, as being a bit of sport.

The prisoner made no resistance, but suffered himself to be led passively along.

While the whole troop were thus on their way to the barn, Baker was approaching it in an opposite direction.

He ran a long way after leaving Johnson in the determined way he did.

But at length, as he grew bodily exhausted by his exertions, his mind became much calmer.

The consequences of the rash step he had taken rushed upon him in quite an overwhelming flood, and as he dwelt upon them, his pace rapidly slackened itself from a run to a trot, from a trot to a walk, and at last he came to a full stop.

"D—n Johnson!" he said, at last, with great emphasis, and smacking one hand upon the other as he spoke. "I wish he'd been at the very devil before he spoke! He's been the means of doing me out of my share of the reward, and caused me to make a fool of myself! D—n Johnson!"

Baker smacked his hands together again, and oh, how he wished he had Johnson's head within his reach!

"I can see his little game," he continued—"I should be blind if I couldn't! He thought of frightening me by groaning in that hideous manner while I was busy drinking! Oh, curses! I must go back, and yet he'll laugh at me when I get to the barn! Well, I only hope he does, that's all! If he does, I'll punch his d—d head!"

Whereupon, one hand was dashed into the other with more violence than before.

"I'm off!—I'll go back! The worst of it is, he'll have the laugh at me. And perhaps, if I do go back, I shall be the means of doing him out of that little appointment he's been so anxious to get for such a long while. I'll go, and if I'm not down upon him for this trick sooner or later, my name's not Enoch Baker!"

After thus deciding the point in his mind, Baker wended his way towards the barn.

If he had looked straight across the meadows, he would have seen the other officers coming; but he was so intent upon making straight for the barn door, and considering what he should say that would have the effect of extinguishing Johnson if that individual opened his mouth, that he never once turned his eyes in that direction.

As soon as he got round the corner to the front of the barn, he ejaculated:

"Oh, d—n him! He's inside, making himself comfortable, no doubt! I wish I could frighten him—but no, I won't be guilty of one of his tricks! I'll call him!"

Baker carried this resolve into execution, of course without producing the slightest effect, for at that moment Johnson was being led by both shoulders across the next meadow.

"Oh, he's hiding!" said Baker, after a few minutes' reflection. "What a nuisance the fellow is! If I could but find out just where he is hiding, wouldn't I serve him out! Johnson!" he cried, raising his voice, "if you don't come out and show your nose this very minute, I'll punch your head the next time I come across you!"

This threat had no effect, and then, happening to turn round, what should Baker see but the whole troop of officers approaching.

"Oh, here they come!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if they have caught Jonathan Wild? I do believe they have caught one of 'em, any way, for I can see there's a prisoner. Oh, d—n it, it's a case with my share of the reward, I'm afraid!"

This was a bitter pill for Baker to swallow, but presently he seemed to get it down, for he added:

"Don't I hope old Johnson is up to some trick or other! If he is, won't he look like a fool when the chief officer comes? I won't say a word! He sha'n't know of their approach by me telling, I'll take good care! Perhaps he's

hiding himself up in some corner, and the moment any one enters, he will shout and jump out! Oh, I shall get the best of the villain yet!"

That Baker would do this seemed very probable, though the manner in which he was to obtain his revenge never once entered Baker's mind.

The police officers were now very close to the barn, and the next moment they all drew up in front of the door.

CHAPTER DXLII.

JONATHAN WILD IS FRUSTRATED IN HIS ATTEMPT TO LEAVE THE BARN.

No doubt the reader already attributes the cause of the officers' alarm to Jonathan Wild.

Such was the case.

When the officers entered the barn, he could not have been human if he had not felt to a great extent the perilous nature of his situation.

All depended upon the excellence of his place of concealment; if he was discovered, it would be all over with him—there was no retreat.

But if Jonathan Wild felt all this, how much stronger must have been the impression produced upon his less courageous companion, Mr. Noakes!

It was most fortunate that the walls of the barn were stout and strong.

If they had not been, the violent manner in which the poor Governor trembled would have shaken them to the foundation.

It was also fortunate that he had wedged himself in so tightly, or in his terror he might have made some movement that would have attracted the attention of the police officers.

All passed off well, however, though the fugitives remained in a terrible state of suspense while the officers were searching about in the barn.

At first Jonathan hailed the discovery of the murdered woman with satisfaction, because he thought it would be the means of diverting the attention of his pursuers.

Undoubtedly it had this effect, but he was ready to gnash his teeth with rage when he heard the chief officer issue the instructions for Johnson to remain on guard.

He began to resign himself to despair when the second officer was appointed to stay. He had hoped that the officers, when they had searched the barn, would have gone away.

If they had done this, he would have had an opportunity of leaving, or he might have deemed it advisable to remain in his hiding-place some hours longer, because, after having searched it, the officers would not suspect his presence in the barn.

Now, however, the case was entirely altered, and he found himself in about as dangerous a fix as he had ever been in during the whole course of his life.

While the two officers remained on guard it was quite impossible for him to leave, and how long they would remain was more than he could tell.

The body might not be moved until it had been seen by the jury.

If this should happen, starvation and thirst would compel them to come down.

Or, what was still more probable, if they remained until morning, when the interior of the barn was fully illuminated by the daylight, there was a strong probability that the officers gazing around would discover some token of their presence.

All these thoughts pressed very heavily upon Jonathan Wild.

When he saw by what an accumulation of difficulties he was surrounded, he was almost ready to abandon the idea of making any further resistance.

Presently, however, when the officers had departed, leaving only two of their number behind, the thief-taker's spirits began to revive.

He had extricated himself from so many perilous positions when his escape seemed as much out of the question as it did at the present moment, that he felt a great deal of confidence in his own powers.

He could not help listening to the conversation of the two officers.

It was possible that something might be dropped by

one or both of them that he would be able to avail himself of in some way or other.

He experienced great pleasure in listening to the wrangling that at first took place between them, and it was then that the idea occurred to him of taking advantage of it.

Afterwards, when he noticed how easily frightened Johnson was, Wild cudgelled his brains to find a means by which he could avail himself of the circumstance.

He was yet undecided when he found the two men began to make friends with one another.

This was what he least of all desired; but, in spite of all his mental efforts, he could think of no other mode by which to effect his purpose than that of giving utterance to a low, smothered groan.

This was an experiment attended with a very considerable amount of risk.

Should the officers be proof against such a sound, or should they be able to determine the precise source from which it emanated, he might make up his mind to be discovered.

A consideration of this induced him to take advantage of the time when a slight noise was produced by the Jamaica gurgling down Baker's throat.

Placing his lips rather close to the thatch, Jonathan Wild uttered a groan, the effects of which we have already described.

Owing to his singular position, the sound seemed to ascend to the highest point of the roof, and then to descend, filling the whole building in such a manner as to make it difficult, if not impossible, to say from what corner it came, or whether from above or below.

Although the groan was attended with such beneficial results, Jonathan Wild broke out into a cold sweat, for the thought had all at once occurred to him that Mr. Noakes might be as much terrified by the groan as the officers, and, under the influence of fear, either do or say something that would attract the notice of his foes.

And, indeed, the thief-taker had good cause to be alarmed upon this point.

Had it been possible for the Governor to move, he certainly would have done so, for the hideous groan almost terrified him to death.

But, as he was wedged in between the top of the wall and the thatch of the roof, he was unable to stir hand or foot.

Then he tried to scream, or groan, or, at any rate, to give utterance to a cry of some sort; but terror seemed to freeze up all his faculties.

He opened his mouth widely, but no sound—not even a whisper—issued from it.

Finding his companion was silent, and scarcely knowing the cause, Jonathan Wild began to breathe more freely.

The effects of this groan have already been described at full length.

It succeeded a thousand times better than Jonathan ever expected or hoped it would; and when he saw the two officers at length get outside the building, he was ready to give vent to his delight by a triumphant shout.

Prudence, however, restrained this manifestation.

By listening intently, he managed to overhear the greater part of the altercation that took place between Johnson and Baker while they were in the open air.

He ascertained that the latter had fled, and rejoiced accordingly.

Still, he was disappointed, for after the terror the pair had shown, he had made sure that they would both have taken to their heels, and never ventured to come near the barn for a length of time.

Moving himself slightly from his position, in order to get closer to his companion, Jonathan Wild said, in a faint whisper—so faint that it could not possibly reach the ears of Johnson, who was busy communing with himself outside:

"Noakes—Noakes!"

The Governor endeavoured to reply.

But his tongue clung to the roof of his mouth, and had his life depended upon it, he could not have uttered a syllable in reply.

"Noakes!" said Wild again, a little louder than before, "I don't know whether you are silent because you are afraid to reply; but if you can hear what I say, remain where you are."

That Jonathan was about to leave him was more than Mr. Noakes could endure, and so his tongue was released.

"What is it you want, Mr. Wild?" he asked.

"Oh, so you have found your tongue at last, have you?"

"Yes."

"Don't speak so loud—you'll have that fool outside hear you! Don't raise your voice above a whisper."

"Do you want me for something, Mr. Wild?" asked the Governor.

"Have you heard what has been going on below so lately?"

"Yes, and am almost frightened to death!"

"Bah! The danger now is over, or nearly so! Do you understand what has taken place?"

"I think so."

"Don't you think that groan was very effective?"

"Very—did you hear it?"

"Rather, I think! Were you not aware it came from my lips?"

"No."

"Well, it did; but I must be quick—listen!"

"I am listening."

"That's well, then. I have succeeded in my intention, which, as of course you must be aware, was to drive those two officers away from the barn, in order that we might make our escape from it."

"Are we not safe here?"

"No—we shall be found as soon as ever it is daylight! They cannot fail then to see us from below. However, your best plan is to lie still just where you are."

"But where are you going?"

"Only down on the floor, just to give my friend outside a little extra fright! I think I shall be able to scare him away, and then we must take the opportunity to slip out immediately!"

"Perhaps I can help you, Mr. Wild. Let me come down."

"Very well, do so, but make no sound."

With some difficulty Mr. Noakes released himself from his uncomfortable position, and followed the thief-taker on to the beam.

They then dropped as swiftly as they could on to the floor of the barn.

"Remain where you are, Noakes," said Wild, "and leave the rest to me. If you look out, you will see what I am going to do."

Jonathan did not wait to hear the reply made by his companion, for time was precious, and he was anxious to get out of the barn.

The idea which had occurred to the thief-taker was truly a horrible one, and almost any other person, less brutalised than himself, would have shrunk from adopting such a means to scare away the officer.

Without the least compunction or hesitation, Jonathan Wild crept across the barn to that corner of it where the murdered remains lay.

He could not see with any distinctness, and so was obliged to rely chiefly upon his sense of touch.

As he had noticed the spot where the dead body was found, he had but little difficulty in reaching it.

Stooping down, he took hold of the headless body and dragged it across the floor of the barn.

Mr. Noakes could not for the life of him imagine what Wild was about, and he strained his eyes to the utmost in the hope of being able to pierce the gloom.

It was only a second or so before Johnson turned round, after having made up his mind to re-enter the barn, that Jonathan Wild arrived near the threshold with his ghastly burden.

He placed the corpse in an upright position—that is to say, standing on its feet—while he placed himself behind it, and thus preserved it in an erect posture, and at the same time secured himself from observation.

Some time having elapsed since the storm cleared off, the moon's position had slightly changed.

Still her beams fell with full force upon the ground just over the threshold of the barn.

It will be easily understood how vivid this apparition would appear to Johnson, the police officer, when he turned round so suddenly and beheld it.

It produced scarcely less effect upon Mr. Noakes, upon whom the sight came quite as unexpectedly.

The Governor, however, did not manifest his terror by shouting aloud, but his senses deserted him, and he fell down at full length.

The extraordinary effects produced by his former groan induced Jonathan to repeat it.

With what success we have already seen.

With such a horrible sight before his eyes, and such a horrible sound ringing in his ears, who can wonder that Johnson should have run on so blindly and so heedlessly?

Generally, Jonathan Wild dealt in a very summary way with anything that had ceased to be of service to him.

The dead body was no exception.

As soon as the officer fled, he flung it carelessly to one side, and hastened to the door.

Johnson was already a long way off, and, chuckling to himself with the satisfaction he felt at having succeeded in dispersing the two officers, Jonathan called aloud upon his companion.

He believed no time was to be lost, and that the sooner they quitted that place, the better it would be for them.

No response was made to his call, owing to the Governor having swooned.

Furious with rage, Jonathan at length discovered him, and dealt poor Mr. Noakes two such violent kicks in the ribs that he opened his eyes at once.

"Get up, you infernal idiot!" roared Wild. "Get up, I say! What did you want to lie down like that for? Why didn't you answer me when I called to you?"

Mr. Noakes sat up in a very undignified manner, and rubbed his head with a puzzled expression.

"Get up," said Wild, "and let's leave this place! If we are not off at once, we shall have these police officers back again. They will get the better of their fright, and then we shall be worse off than ever, because their suspicions will be aroused then!"

Mr. Noakes got up on his feet, though not without some trouble, for the two kicks in the ribs that Wild had given him caused him intense pain whenever he drew his breath.

Seizing him by the coat, Jonathan again hurried to the door of the barn.

Taking care not to expose any part of his person to the rays of the moon more than he could help, in case any of his foes should by chance be near enough to perceive him, he took a hasty and scrutinising glance everywhere around.

As before, the whole face of the country was bathed in moonlight, but not one of the police officers could be seen.

"Now then, come on!" said Wild. "We must seize this favourable opportunity!"

"Are you sure no one is in sight, Mr. Wild?"

"Of course I am, stupid! If I was not, do you think I should venture forth?"

Thus rebuked, Mr. Noakes became silent.

"I would give no small trifle if a cloud would cover the moon for a little while! Curse it! What a nuisance it is! I don't want the moon to shine!"

Speaking these words in snarling tones, Jonathan Wild passed out of the barn, dragging his companion with him.

As soon as ever he gained the angle of the building he stopped and had another look.

He was lucky in having taken this precaution, for a human form, and, as he believed, a police officer, was making his way towards the barn in a direct line.

Seeing this, Jonathan hastily drew back and crept round to the other side.

In this quarter there was no one to be seen, so he turned the corner without hesitation.

It so happened that the shadow of the building lay in this direction, and concealed the forms of the fugitives admirably.

Beyond that shadow the grass in the meadow seemed like liquid silver, and Jonathan was frightened to venture across it, for he knew that his form would be visible from an immense distance.

While he stood still hesitating, the police officer—for such he was, and no other than Baker—reached the door of the barn, where he stopped.

Jonathan was now afraid to move lest he should be heard.

Suddenly, however, he felt his companion clutch him by the arm, and, turning round, saw him pointing across the meadow.

Following the direction of his finger, which pointed to the course that Johnson had taken in his precipitate flight, the thief-taker perceived the whole troop of police officers returning direct to the barn.

His heart sank within him, and he felt quite unable to decide what he should do.

CHAPTER DXLIII.

THE TWO OFFICERS ENDEAVOUR TO EXPLAIN THE MYSTERY, BUT ONLY MAKE IT MORE PROFOUND.

CONCEALED in the deep shadow that the moon cast on one side of the barn, Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes overheard all that took place.

They pressed themselves against the darkened wall as closely as they could, in the hope of being able to escape the observation of the officers.

Still, it was not without the greatest uneasiness that they watched the rapid and certain approach of their deadly foes.

The officers came nearer and nearer, and each step they took increased the danger and difficulty of Wild's position.

Although well aware of this, he did not dare to move a step.

While he had the courage and presence of mind to stand perfectly still, there was just a bare possibility of his remaining unseen.

On the contrary, if he ventured to move, and once got within the sphere of the moon's rays, the officers would immediately perceive him, and then he would be placed more desperately than ever.

Moreover, he would be in pistol-shot of his foes.

He was no stranger to the orders they had received, and he easily understood that they would avoid all the trouble they could by taking the advantage of slaying him first and making him prisoner afterwards.

Although half stupefied with fear, and deprived of the proper use of his senses, even Mr. Noakes could not fail to comprehend the necessity of remaining immovable.

The few words which Baker had uttered sufficed to let Jonathan know the precise state of affairs, and he could not help feeling an amount of exultation upon finding that he had been the means of discomfiting two of his enemies, although the meanest of them.

When the officers stopped before the barn door in the manner we have previously described, Jonathan listened with considerable interest to all that took place.

He felt rather more at ease than he had done a moment before, for while the police officers retained their present position they could not by any possibility catch sight of that side of the building upon which he was standing.

Had there been a chance, he would have stolen away, but, in the hope that a better opportunity would quickly present itself, he remained.

When Baker saw his companions with a prisoner, he made certain it was either Jonathan Wild or Mr. Noakes.

What words can possibly express his surprise when he found, so far from it being either of those individuals, it was no other than his companion Johnson?

He rubbed his eyes and fancied himself under the influence of a dream.

A second glance, however, convinced him that his eyesight had not deceived him.

There stood Johnson, with a police officer on each side of him, and with a pair of handcuffs claspings his wrists.

At first he was quite at a loss to understand how it could possibly happen that Johnson was a prisoner, but at the same time the idea struck him that he might be re-venged in good earnest.

Can the reader imagine the mortification of Johnson when he heard the chief officer say to Baker:

"Oh, you're at your post, I see! Pray, what the devil is the meaning of all this?"

"All what, sir?"

"Why, can't you see there's Johnson a prisoner? Why has he left you, and why are you on the outside of the barn?"

Johnson had by this time recovered in a very great degree from his fright.

He was not a little surprised to see Baker standing near the door; but, ever suspicious and fancying something or other, the notion entered his head that his second fright was due to Baker, who must have crept into the barn unperceived by him.

A moment's consideration made him think that he could see the whole ramification of a plot before him, the object of which was neither more nor less than to hinder his promotion to the post he had so long burned to occupy.

He made up his mind that Baker would take the utmost advantage of the situation.

Then, in accordance with the mode of revenging himself upon which he had decided, the words Baker spoke served to convince Johnson more and more that the plot he suspected was really and actually in existence.

Baker was ready-witted enough, but he could not decide all in a moment what his first answer should be.

In an impatient and angry tone, the chief officer said again:

"What the devil is the meaning of all this? Why don't you answer me? Why are you on the outside of the barn? You ought to be inside!"

"I know I ought, sir," said Baker, in a very humble voice, and with a low bow. "I hope you'll excuse me for being where I am, but I can give you a good reason for it!"

"Do so, then, and don't be so damnably long-winded!"

"Well, sir, I don't like to say it, but it's the truth nevertheless!"

"What's the truth?"

"Why, sir, the reason why I came to the door was, that I might look for Johnson."

Hearing these words, Johnson ground his teeth in such a furious manner that the two officers who held him looked quite scared.

"To do what?" asked the chief officer, in the utmost surprise.

"To look for Johnson, sir!"

"But what business had he to leave his post?"

"Must I make a clean breast of the whole matter from first to last, sir?" asked Baker. "I should be glad to do it, I can assure you, for it would take a great weight off my mind."

"Yes, by all means, Baker! Just tell us all about it."

"Thank you, sir, I will."

"Perhaps you wouldn't object to hear a word or two from me?" said Johnson, with difficulty subduing his voice sufficiently to speak.

"Your turn will come next. Don't you see I am speaking to Baker? What right have you to interrupt me?"

Johnson poured out a string of curses under his voice, and the officer continued:

"You, Baker, being evidently at your post, and doing your duty, have a right to be heard first, so please to make a clean breast of the affair in as few words as you possibly can."

"I will, sir. I am rather sorry to say it. In the first place, Johnson was awfully frightened."

"Frightened of what?"

"Being in the barn, sir, and that's why he asked you to let some one stay with him. Don't you remember you told him to keep guard by himself, and he asked you for some one to keep him company!"

"Of course he did, and I chose him for the duty because, as he was an old and tried hand, and anxious to rise, I thought I would give him a chance for promotion."

That was gall and wormwood to Johnson, and oh, how he cursed himself for having been such a fool as to have asked for a companion.

Had he remained by himself, all would have been well, and he would have attained his desire.

Now, so far from being any nearer, he was further off than ever.

Up to that moment he had always been respected and thought much of, and now he was in disgrace.

But the conviction settled more strongly than ever in

his mind that Baker, and Baker only, was the cause of his misfortune.

It was Baker who had crept back into the barn and given him a second and more dreadful fright than the first.

In his own breast he bitterly vowed revenge.

In the meanwhile, Baker, actuated by very similar feelings, went on with his tale to the officer.

"After you had gone a little while, sir, we were talking about one thing and another, and Johnson, he acted quite like a crocodile, he did! I never suspected his designs for a moment, but they soon became clear enough!"

"Designs?" asked the officer. "What do you mean? Shall I ever get to the bottom of this?"

"I hope so, sir; and I hope you'll see me righted, for, at all risks, I have stuck to my post."

"So you have. Go on."

"Well, sir, Johnson tried to frighten me."

"What rubbish! I am surprised at an old hand like you being up to such tricks!" said the officer, angrily.

"This is how he did it, sir! He gave me a bottle of rum and invited me to drink, and as I was very cold, and my clothes were wet, and as I thought it wouldn't be any harm just to have a little drop, and I never intended to drink above a mouthful—"

"There, there—stop! Don't occupy my time with making your excuses! He offered you rum, and you drank some of it! What next?"

"The very first drops, sir, was trickling down my throat—I'll take my davy I hadn't had a tea-spoonful—when, all of a sudden, Johnson gave a most awful groan! It scared me, and I couldn't help it! I jumped up and ran to the door in my fright, but as soon as I smelt fresh air I was all right again!"

"What did Johnson do?"

"Why, he pretended to be frightened himself, and seemed very much vexed to find I stood it so coolly, for what he intended to do was to frighten me away, so that he could represent to you that I was a coward and afraid to stop, and by being here himself, and keeping everything square, would be able to get his promotion!"

"But what did Johnson run away for?" asked the chief officer. "I am beginning to have my doubts of you, Baker! What you're telling me sounds very much like a made-up, cock-and-bull sort of tale! Perhaps you can explain yourself?"

Baker scratched his head, for he hardly knew how to get over his difficulty.

But his invention, which had assisted him so far, did not desert him, and, with a scarcely perceptible pause, he said:

"Why, sir, Johnson pretended to be frightened himself when he got outside, so that I shouldn't be suspicious of him; and he said he didn't care for any consequences, but he wasn't going to stop in a place where there was a dead body groaning, and so he ran away."

"Oh, pooh! stuff!" said the officer; "you must not expect me to believe such rubbish as that. I fancy that the two of you are such horrible liars that I shall never get to the root of the matter."

The tide now seemed turning in Johnson's favour, and that individual brightened up accordingly.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, with the greatest humility, "but you haven't heard my side of the story yet. I think you are rather too hard on me. I'll take my oath that what Baker has said is a lie from beginning to end; but you haven't heard my version."

"The conduct of the pair of you is very suspicious; and if I find anything wrong, or different to what it was when I left the barn, I shall take you both prisoners, and hold you responsible. As for you, Baker, it's absurd to suppose that Johnson should run away. What object could he have?"

"If you'd allow me to explain, sir, I could tell you in a moment. Johnson only pretended to run away. He thought if he ran away, I didn't dare stop by myself, and that I should run away too, and then he could come back; but he made a mistake, for though I didn't go back inside, I stood by the door all the while."

"Sir," said Johnson, "I hope you'll do me the justice to hear what I have to say. All that Baker has been telling is a parcel of d—d lies, and I'll prove it!"

"I don't intend to hear any more of the affair!" said the

chief officer, in a positive tone of voice, "so it's useless for you to say another word! Baker, until this is cleared up, consider yourself in custody; and, as I said before, if I find that a single thing has been disturbed inside, you will both have to answer for it! Follow me into the barn!"

With these words, the officer, with a great deal of indignation in his looks and manner, stalked through the doorway, followed closely by his men.

As soon as he got inside, the officer trod upon something that threw him down.

A frightful yell came from his lips, and he made the most desperate efforts to rise.

"A light—a light!" he shrieked. "D—n you all! A light! You shall suffer for this pretty smartly!"

By the time the officer rose to his feet, a lantern was lighted, and by the aid of its beams he took a good look about him.

The first thing he saw was the dead body lying not far from the door, and he gave a sickening shudder at the thought of having fallen down upon anything so loathsome.

He turned fairly black in the face with rage, and he exclaimed:

"Oho, Baker and Johnson, this is your little game, is it? You have been up to your larks, but I'll d—d soon let you know that I am not to be played with! If you think you've got hold of a fool, you're mistaken! You shall suffer for this! I can give my account of the affair! You shall both be dismissed from the service, and be treated to an extra trifle in the shape of a few months' imprisonment! Oh, curse you both! But I'll wager my head against a brass nail that you don't play me a trick again! Handcuff both the villains, and keep 'em secure!"

The chief officer was in such a state of rage that for some time he scarcely knew what he was about.

The sight of the two delinquents securely handcuffed had a soothing effect upon his system, and as his thoughts returned to their proper channel, he remembered the suspicion that had found a place in his mind just before his extraordinary encounter with Johnson.

"I'll have this place searched thoroughly!" he exclaimed. "Light all your lanterns, and pry into every corner! It's my belief that those we want are concealed somewhere close at hand!"

The summary manner in which their chief had dealt with Baker and Johnson produced a great increase in the submission of his men, and they set about obeying his instructions with remarkable promptitude.

To describe in detail all that they did would, however, be uninteresting, from the simple fact that the reader is already aware that Jonathan Wild was no longer in the barn.

An attentive search discovered to them, however, some trifling things which had before escaped their notice.

In the first place, they saw the ashes marking the spot where Jonathan had lighted the fire.

Then on the walls were several marks, evidently produced by heavy boots, and to a splinter on one of the beams a piece of cloth was fluttering.

But these, in spite of the utmost industry, was all they could find out, so they were compelled in good earnest to give up all hopes of capturing Wild and Mr. Noakes, on that occasion at least.

They consoled themselves as best they could in investigating the murder, the traces of which they had so unexpectedly discovered.

CHAPTER DXLIV.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS HE IS NOT QUITE SO SAFE AS HE IMAGINED HIMSELF TO BE.

ALTHOUGH he was in so much jeopardy, Jonathan Wild could not help feeling greatly amused at the result of the explanation which Baker had attempted to give.

But this enjoyment was too dangerous for him to wish to follow it up.

The entrance of all the officers into the barn was just the opportunity he had been waiting for.

So as soon as he was sure that they were fairly beneath

the roof of the building, he clutched hold of Mr. Noakes, and whispered in his ear:

"Now run for your life, or, after all, you're a dead man!"

With these words, the thief-taker set off at a run, which the Governor was forced to keep pace with, though it tried his wind very severely.

On the soft turf their footsteps made no sound, and such was their speed that in a very few minutes they were clear of the meadow in which the barn stood, and were skulking along under a hedge which, fortunately, ran in such a direction as to conceal them from the view of their enemies in case they should suddenly emerge into the moonlight.

Jonathan did not run far before he began to feel much exhausted, and slackened his pace accordingly.

Still he pushed on, for he knew how important it was to place as great a distance between himself and his foes as he possibly could.

With this view he hurried his companion along, and turned a deaf ear to all his entreaties for a few moments' rest.

"This is not the time for rest!" Wild would exclaim—"this is the time for action! What have you been doing during the last few hours but resting?"

The Governor groaned.

It was evident that his idea of what rest was differed from his companion's.

As the police officers made no attempt to pursue them, the fugitives got to a considerable distance without interruption.

Gaining the summit of a piece of rising ground, Jonathan ventured to stand still for a moment, and take a long look behind him.

He was not yet so far as to be out of sight of the barn, although it was a long way off.

The moonbeams, however, seemed to shine upon it with peculiar distinctness.

All around was very still, and nowhere in the intervening space could he catch sight of a single moving object which his fancy could form into a police officer.

"I think I've done them at last!" he exclaimed, in tones of the utmost satisfaction—"though it's been a hard push, and we have had several narrow escapes! But what does it matter? 'A miss is as good as a mile!'"

"But oh, this is misery!" moaned Mr. Noakes—"utter misery! How delightful, after such a turmoil, must be the calm repose of the grave!"

"Calm repose of a fiddlestick!" exclaimed the thief-taker, angrily and impatiently, for his spirits always rose whenever he had escaped a danger. "Don't talk such infernal nonsense! Morning is not far off, and we must find a fresh place of shelter before daylight."

Noakes only replied by a groan.

"Get up with you!" said Wild.

"Oh, I'm so very faint! My strength seems to have deserted me entirely!"

It is not to be wondered at that the Governor should complain of exhaustion; indeed, it is somewhat surprising that he should have been able to keep up so well as he had done after losing such a vast quantity of blood.

"Get up, Noakes!" said Wild, in a gentler voice. "It will do no good to lie there! I am sick and faint myself! We will go somewhere and obtain refreshment and shelter at the same time. Of course, the further away we get from the barn, the less danger we shall be in. Come along, old fellow! I'll help you up!"

Jonathan Wild suited the action to the word.

The manner in which he had triumphed over his enemies made him for the time quite amiable.

"Oh, it's glorious!" he said. "If I had not been quite so hard pushed as I have lately, how I should have enjoyed that scene! It's charming!"

"What's charming?" asked Mr. Noakes. "Everything seems wretched enough to me, I can assure you!"

"Oh, grumble away! That's about like you! I suppose you'd have been better satisfied if you'd been caught by the officers, instead of walking along by me in comparative safety, and had been on your way to Newgate!"

"Don't be angry, Mr. Wild! I hope I shall be better soon!"

"All right! I feel so good-tempered that I could be friends with anybody! If there hadn't been quite so

much risk in it, how I should like to have listened at the door of the barn to have heard what was said when they got inside!"

Mr. Noakes shuddered with horror at the bare idea of such a thing.

"What a glorious state of confusion they must be in!" said Wild, in an exulting tone of voice. "If ever they rightly understand what has happened—if ever they comprehend one another's motives and actions—it's an odd thing to me!"

"Don't walk quite so fast, Mr. Wild!" interposed Mr. Noakes. "I can't keep up with you!"

"Well, I'll walk slower; but just at the moment I was so delighted that I forgot! Is it not glorious that we should have outwitted our enemies, and got them involved in such a mass of complications?"

"Yes, very!" said Mr. Noakes, feebly.

"I shouldn't wonder if it doesn't end with a regular battle between Baker and Johnson! If it does, I hope they'll both kill themselves—that's all!"

Wild experienced a return of his natural ferocity.

Conversing in this manner upon the events which had recently befallen them, and speculating as to the consequences that would arise out of the mysterious transactions in the old barn, they continued on their way across the open country.

They journeyed on for many miles without meeting with any interruption whatever—indeed, without catching sight either of a human being or a habitation.

The moon sank beneath the horizon, and morning dawned cheerless and cold.

The atmosphere suddenly became surcharged with watery particles, which settled themselves upon the apparel of the fugitives.

The first beams of the sun showed them, in the far distance, the chimneys.

Believing that they had got far enough from their foes to be out of danger, and that the inhabitants of the house would be unaware of their identity, the thief-taker slightly changed his course, with the intention of demanding rest and refreshment.

Rather more than a quarter of an hour's walk brought them to a broad but apparently little-travelled road.

It was at the side of this that the dwelling they had perceived had been erected.

Upon a closer approach, they found it to be an inn.

When Jonathan first proposed that they should stop here for a time, Mr. Noakes was so overcome with terror as to be almost incapable of motion.

"Surely you can't be in earnest?" he managed to gasp out at length. "It will be madness for us to attempt such a thing!"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Wild. "In this out-of-the-way spot the probability is that we are totally unknown even by name, and at this early hour, if we find the house open, the chances are all against any customers being in it."

"But don't you think the landlord might recognise us?"

"We must run the risk of that. I must have food, and drink, and rest, and so must you."

These words settled the matter, for, just as he uttered them, Jonathan stopped in front of the inn.

The landlord, who seemed to have just risen, was standing at the front door.

He had noticed the fugitives approaching when they had been at a great distance.

When they came closer, their appearance by no means prepossessed him in their favour.

"Good morning, sir," said Wild, assuming, with difficulty, a humbleness of demeanour. "I wish you a very good morning!"

"March on!" said the landlord, abruptly. "I've nothing to give—times are too bad! March on—you'll get nothing here!"

"We are not beggars, sir," said Wild, "though we are not very well off, as I dare say our looks bespeak; but we are unfortunate, and that's not a crime."

"I know that—but I have nothing to give away!"

"We don't want you to give," said Wild, "but we are on tramp to Liverpool, at which place I hope to get a berth on board a ship. We have walked almost without ceasing since sunset, and we are now so tired as to be unable to go any further."

"Well, I can't shelter you, and that's a fact!"

"Can't you let us have a bed?" implored Wild. "We are not penniless. I will pay you for whatever accommodation we have."

The landlord shook his head.

"I don't like your looks," he said, "and that's flat—so I don't want your money!"

"Perhaps you don't believe me," said Wild, taking a gold piece from his pocket. "Look! here is a guinea, which will pay our expenses for stopping here."

The sight of the guinea seemed to soften the landlord's heart.

Desirous not to let slip the opportunity of obtaining possession of such a sum, he said:

"I can't accommodate you in the way you want; but if you like to take things as they are, I don't mind."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't let you a bed, because I have none to spare, and, besides, you are dirty and ragged; but if you like to lie down in the loft, among the hay, over the stable, and will give me a trifle for it, you shall do so."

At first sight, this did not seem to be a very tempting offer; but, after a momentary consideration, Jonathan Wild determined to accept it.

Mr. Noakes was surprised that he should do so, but said nothing, being quite content, as usual, to leave the direction of all things to his companion.

"We are ragged and dirty, I know," replied Wild; "but the accommodation, bad as it is, will do for us, providing you do not charge too much."

"I only want that guinea."

"You shall have it if you find us with food and drink as well."

"Agreed."

"You will do so?"

"I will."

"Lead the way, then."

"Go under the gateway," replied the landlord; "you will see the stables then in front of you, and you can go up into the loft."

"And you?"

"I will follow close with something to eat and drink."

With these words, the landlord turned on his heel, and entered the inn, and Jonathan, quite reconciled to his lot, made as speedy a disappearance under the gateway as he possibly could.

He half dragged his companion after him.

As they had been told, they found the stables just in front of them.

Anxious to get out of sight, Jonathan crossed the yard hastily.

But before they could do much more than enter the stables, the landlord appeared at the back door of the inn, carrying quite a large quantity of provisions in his hands.

Jonathan waited for him to approach.

"Up with you!" he cried. "There are the steps. Go first—I will follow!"

Following with his eye the direction of the landlord's finger, Wild saw a perpendicular ladder against the wall.

Up this ladder he ascended with great speed and agility.

Mr. Noakes followed as well as his exhaustion would allow him.

The landlord brought up the rear.

The scent from the hay in the loft was quite pleasant, and when he saw how well stocked the place was, the thief-taker did not doubt that he should be able to make himself comfortable.

The Governor sat down with a sigh.

"Now for your guinea!" exclaimed the landlord.

"Give us the provisions!"

"Not first! I shan't trust you any further than I can see you!"

"Why not?"

"You are no good, either of you. Anyone could see that at a glance! However, what you have done makes no odds to me—it's none of my business!"

"I wish everybody was of your way of thinking!" growled Wild.

"Come—the guinea!"

"Here it is!"



[JONATHAN WILD IS WARNED FOR THE SECOND TIME.]

"And here is something to eat and drink! Cut off now wherever you like! You won't be in my debt!" So saying, the landlord quitted the loft.

Wild and the Governor were both famished and thirsty, and although their position was so truly dangerous, they at first thought about nothing but satisfying their natural cravings.

At last Mr. Noakes ventured to ask:

"How long do you think we shall be able to stop here?"

"How the devil do you think I know? As long as our foes will let us!"

"But—but don't you think we are dangerously situated?"

"We cannot well hope to be safer."

"But, Mr. Wild?"

"What?"

"Now that we have satisfied our hunger, don't you

think we had better stow the remainder of the provisions about us, and be off?"

"No, I don't!"

"Why not?"

"I intend to have some rest and sleep, and you had better have some too."

"I—I dare not!"

"We will keep watch by turns, and by that means we shall be safer. You shall take the first sleep, and I will watch."

"But if the officers come?"

"I will awake you."

"But how shall we escape?"

"Hold your row, and leave things to me! Do as I tell you!"

"But sleep will be impossible in this place!"

"Then you can keep watch."

With these words, Wild stretched himself at full length

upon the hay, and, closing his eyes, seemed to fall immediately into a deep slumber.

There was little fear about the Governor keeping watch.

Crawling to the circular aperture in the wall, which was the only place from which a view of the exterior could be obtained, he peeped forth.

After a time, when he found what a profound stillness reigned all around the inn, his apprehensions gradually subsided.

He began to think that he was really alarming himself without due cause.

After what had happened he was forced to come to the conclusion that the officers would have to be much more clever than they had shown themselves to be if they succeeded in getting upon their track.

But his greatest source of dread was that the landlord should mention the fact of their being in the loft—perhaps to some police officers in the neighbourhood, who would, of course, have their suspicions excited.

Two hours passed slowly away.

Although it was now fairly day, there was no more sign of bustle and activity about the inn than there was when they first halted before it.

The silence of the place seemed suggestive of security.

It had a sleepy tendency also.

In spite of what he had said, Mr. Noakes found his eyes gradually closing.

At last he resolved to wake his companion, and did so.

"Lie down and sleep, Noakes!" he said. "Sleep till I wake you; and I only hope you will feel as much benefited as myself!"

Mr. Noakes was only too glad to obey this injunction.

Jonathan watched for some time, when, finding how profoundly silent all around him was, he resolved to descend into the stable and reconnoitre a little.

Any information thus gained could not fail to be of service to him.

The only occupants of the stable were a couple of horses.

Jonathan approached and examined them with a critical eye.

He was much surprised to find horses of such excellent quality in such a place.

But he was far from displeased.

Pursuing his researches still further, he discovered the harness-room, which contained the necessary trappings to fit the horses in readiness for the road.

CHAPTER DXLV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES TAKE POSSESSION OF THE TWO HORSES IN THE STABLE.

"Good—good!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together. "I feel quite contented now, and shall fear nothing!"

Wild left the harness-room, and crept towards the door of the stable.

It would have pleased him very much to have made himself familiar with the whole of the premises, but this he did not care to do, lest he should be seen by some one, though there did not appear to be anyone about.

He made his way into the loft again, and, seating himself close to the circular aperture of which we have spoken, he waited for his companion to awake.

More than once the thief-taker's eyes closed in slumber, and he would wake with a sudden start, fancying his foes were close at hand.

In this manner the day gradually passed by.

Towards evening the landlord paid them another visit.

"So you are here still!" he said. "I think it's high time you tramped off again!"

"We are going," said Wild, still preserving his humbleness of demeanour; "but we are hungry. Can you not bring us another meal into this place? And after we have eaten it, we will depart."

"Yes, if you will make it worth my while to serve you. I feel more convinced than ever by your looks that you are no good! You have been up to something you ought not!"

"You said, when you were here before," remarked

Wild, "it did not signify to you what we were, or what we had done."

"It is no business of mine," said the landlord; "but I may be running a risk by having you in the place, so, in order to make amends, you must pay well for accommodation!"

"I don't mind doing that! Will you bring us another meal?"

"Yes, if you will pay me well."

"How much do you want?"

"A guinea."

Wild at once took the coin mentioned from his pocket, and handed it to the landlord, who pocketed it with evident satisfaction.

He then retired, and Noakes said:

"What an extortionate rascal he is!"

"You're right!" said Wild. "But it will not do for us to offend him. It would be bad policy on our part."

"Of course."

"But never mind," continued Wild, with one of his old chuckles—"never mind!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, except that I intend to have my money's worth out of him, and perhaps something more!"

"How?"

"Wait and see! Hush—he's coming!"

The landlord reappeared, bringing with him a very substantial meal, which, however, was very dear at the price.

"Perhaps you won't mind letting us stay for an hour after we have eaten this?" said Wild, respectfully.

"Indeed I shall, though—I shall insist upon your leaving at once!"

"But that is scarcely fair."

"I don't see that! However, I have told you my price, and if you like to pay for stopping, you can!"

"You are very hard upon us!" said Wild. "We are very badly off, and if you demand any more money, you will take all we have!"

"Which won't matter much," said the landlord, "for you look just the sort of man to knock anyone down on the road, and take his purse from him!"

"You are too hard!" said Wild again. "But tell me how much money you will require to allow us to remain here until dark."

"If you will give me another guinea," said the landlord, "I won't trouble you again; and you can stop here all night if you like; but if not, you must take yourselves off at once!"

"Here it is!" said Wild, with a heavy sigh, giving the landlord the guinea, for he wished to produce in his mind the impression that it was almost the last coin he possessed.

The landlord received it with a grin, and as he descended from the loft, congratulated himself upon having done a very good day's work indeed.

"They bleed well!" was the remark. "I wish I knew who they were, and whether there was much reward offered for their apprehension! If there was, I'd go in for a share! Now, there's Jubbins, the parish constable—I'll go over to him, and ask his advice!"

"What's that you intend doing next?" asked Mr. Noakes, rather more cheerfully than usual, for the sleep and food he had had produced a beneficial effect upon his spirits.

"Don't trouble your head about that," said Jonathan, "but leave it all to me! Don't eat all this, however. We will carry as much away with us as we can. It may prove useful."

"A good thought!" said the Governor, who ceased eating at once.

Jonathan Wild now waited with extreme impatience for night to come.

He was anxious to get still further from the ruined barn, but he knew well it would not be wise to take his departure while there was a chance of his being seen.

At last the welcome darkness spread itself over the earth.

"Now, Noakes," cried Jonathan, "just follow me, and I'll show you something that will please you!"

Wondering at what his companion alluded to, for he had not noticed the horses in the stable below, Mr. Noakes descended the ladder.

"There," cried the thief-taker—"do you see those nags?"

"They are just right for the road—well rested, well fed, and in excellent condition! I think we have got them rather cheap!"

"Do you mean to ride away with them?"

"Of course I do! Why did you ask that ridiculous question?"

"But we shall be seen or heard—we shall be discovered—I am sure of it!"

"Bah! Go straight on, and you will see a door! Open it, and against the wall you will see two saddles and bridles—bring them here, and quickly!"

Mr. Noakes obeyed, though he trembled at the thought of what might be the consequences.

In a very few minutes both horses were saddled and bridled ready for use.

"Mount in the stable," said Jonathan, "and then follow me with all speed! I shall make a rush for it, and it will be your own fault if you get into trouble by lagging behind!"

While speaking these words, Jonathan seated himself in the saddle.

Mr. Noakes followed his example.

"Now!" cried Wild. "One—two, and away!"

The stable door was wide open, and they dashed out into the yard with terrific speed.

As they did so, a loud shout struck upon their ears.

It came from the lips of the landlord, who, in company with his friend, the parish constable, was about to enter the stables.

The latter had advised the landlord to take them into custody, and chance the consequences.

The anger of the landlord, when he saw them both dash by at full speed on the two horses, is a thing which could be imagined much better than it can be described.

He stamped and swore, and, taking off his hat, dashed it frantically upon the ground, and then jumped on it.

These demonstrations of rage, however, did no good.

His horses were gone, and he knew perfectly well that he stood but a slight chance of ever seeing them again.

The loss, of course, was a serious one, for both horses were of first-rate quality.

The parish constable in vain endeavoured to console him.

Indeed, the landlord turned round upon his old friend, for he said:

"Shut up, you old idiot! If you were any good, you would run after and catch them, and bring me my horses back!"

"Me run?"

"Yes, you old swilling vagabond! Here have I got to pay taxes to keep you, and I wonder what good you are, after all! Bah!—hold your row, I tell you!"

With these words, the landlord picked up his damaged hat, and, pulling it low down upon his brows, strode back into the public-house.

Scarcely had he crossed the threshold than he heard the loud trampling of horses' feet on the road outside, and then, with great suddenness, the sound ceased.

"Hallo! House—house!" cried a voice.

In far from an amiable humour the landlord went to the front door, and there he saw a good-sized troop of mounted police officers.

"Ah!" he yelled, in a furious tone of voice, "you have come just in time! After them—after them! Curse the villains, they have stolen two horses worth a hundred pounds! Why don't you all go after them, I say?"

The landlord spoke so excitedly, and behaved himself altogether in such an extraordinary manner, that the police officers began to think that what they had taken for an inn was in reality a lunatic asylum, and that the landlord was one of the patients.

Of course they made no movement.

"Curse you all!" cried the landlord. "Why don't you go when I tell you? I'm a subject of this realm, I pay my rent, and I pay my taxes! After them! Don't you understand what I mean?"

"Oh, go to the devil!" cried the officer in command. "We don't want to listen to your rubbish! Go and call the landlord!"

"You pitiful scoundrel!" was the reply. "You're no better than the rest of them! Me go for the landlord, indeed!"

"Yes; why shouldn't you?"

"Because I'm the landlord myself!"

"Oh, are you? Well, I should have taken you for a madman."

"Damnation!" cried the landlord. "Don't I tell you to go after them? Don't I tell you they have stolen two horses out of my stable, and galloped off down the road, about five minutes ago?"

"Who—who?" cried the officer, anxiously, believing that he was about to learn important intelligence. "Was there two of 'em?"

"Oh, I see you're coming to your senses at last!" replied the landlord. "Of course there was two of 'em! Do you think three men could gallop away on two horses?"

There was a general laugh at this, in which even the landlord himself faintly joined.

"Come—come!" cried the commanding officer, "we will do what we can to look after the men who, I take it, have stolen your horses! But we are completely knocked up, and must have something to drink first, and so must our horses."

"But you will lose them altogether if you wait."

"No, we shan't. Leave me to know my business; and while we are drinking the ale you can give me some particulars about these two men, or else how shall I know them when I see them?"

"Oh, of course—of course!"

The parish constable had followed closely at the heels of the landlord, and stood just behind him on the threshold of the inn.

Turning round, the landlord beheld him.

"Now, then, fat-paunch, turn round and fetch some ale, while I tell the officers all the particulars! Be quick! Try for once in your life if you can't make yourself useful, you great lump of good-for-nothingness!"

The parish constable threw himself into a defiant attitude, and, placing his clenched fists against his sides so that his arms stuck out akimbo, he cried:

"Do you think I am a lass, Mr. Muggleton? I say, do you think I am a lass? Remember the dignity of a parish constable! Fetch your beasty ale yourself!"

"Beastly ale, do you call it?" cried the landlord, greatly enraged at the epithet. "Take that; and I'll take jolly good care you never drink another pot of it!"

With these hastily-uttered words, he gave the parish constable a sharp crack on the nose, which not only drew blood, but made that fat functionary sit down upon the floor in a very undignified manner.

The officers were all vastly amused at this encounter.

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Muggleton," cried the constable—"you shall smart for this! I won't forget it!"

"Do you want any more?" cried the landlord, dancing round his discomfited adversary. "If you don't, you'd better shut up!"

Thus admonished, the constable became silent, and occupied himself by rubbing his nose in a very doleful sort of way.

Attracted by the noise, the landlord's wife came to the front door, and found her husband in a state of high excitement.

"Ale—ale!" he yelled. "D—n it, are these gentlemen to stand all night at the door waiting for a drop of ale? D—n it all! Why don't you make haste?"

"Fetch the ale yourself, you lazy, idle, good-for-nothing vagabond!" retorted the landlady. "Do you think I'm going to wait upon you hand and foot? No, indeed—not if I knows it!"

So saying, the landlady turned on her heel, and disappeared almost as abruptly as she had come.

"Was ever a man so cursed as I am?" cried the landlord. "It's all through you!" he added, addressing the parish constable, who was struggling to regain his feet.

"Take that, and be d—d to you!"

Another sharp crack was administered, which resulted in laying the constable quite prostrate.

In such a state of anger that he hardly knew what he was about, the landlord turned back into the inn, and appeared directly afterwards with a couple of large cans of ale.

"There you are, gentlemen," he cried. "I rather think I have been expeditious. Everything's happened to vex me to-day. The very tap wouldn't run, so I had to pull out the bung, and that's the reason the cans are filled so quick!"

For some moments nothing was said.

And the officers occupied themselves in drinking the ale, and even the landlord took a drop himself.

It had a slightly soothing effect upon him, so that the officer stood a better chance of obtaining rational replies from him.

"Look here, landlord," he said—"we are down here after a couple of notorious rascals, and we are very anxious to catch them, because, you see, a large reward is offered for them. I rather fancy they must be the very chaps that have stolen your horses."

"Oh, curse it! I wish they had never come near the spot! Two horses, gentlemen, worth, at the very lowest penny, fifty pounds apiece. They'd fetch it if they were put up at auction this very minute."

"Well, we are in pursuit of Jonathan Wild, well known as a thief-taker, and a man named Noakes, who was formerly Governor of Newgate. Listen, and I will describe them to you, and then you will be able to say whether you think they are the same who robbed you of your horses."

CHAPTER DXLVI.

JONATHAN WILD IS ATTACKED BY A TRAVELLER ON THE HIGHWAY.

THE chief police officer now gave to the landlord a tolerably accurate description of the appearance of Jonathan Wild and his companion.

"That's them!" cried the landlord, slapping his thigh. "Oh, d—n the villains! They ought to be boiled in oil!"

"And you say they were actually here at this inn?"

"Yes, up in the loft over the stable, and there they have been a precious long while. What fools you must be! Why the devil didn't you come here a little bit earlier? If you had, you might have caught 'em here, and I should not have lost my horses!"

"I am sorry we didn't," said the chief officer; "it would have been a good round sum in the pockets of all of us. But come on, my boys—they cannot be far off along the road, and if we push on, we shall come up with them, no doubt! Forward!"

"My horses!" screamed the landlord, as the little troop set itself in motion—"my horses! Bring me back my horses, and you may drink every drop of ale there is in my cellar!"

So soon as ever the chief police officer had satisfied himself that he was so close upon the track of Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes, he lost not a moment in giving chase.

Leaving them, however, to push on at the best speed their horses were able to make, we will follow for a time the proceedings of the fugitives.

At a headlong gallop, Jonathan and the Governor tore along the road.

Mr. Noakes did not attempt to control his horse in any way, but let the reins fall loosely on his neck.

By the mere force of example, probably, it kept pace with its companion, which Jonathan urged onwards by repeated blows.

At last, when he imagined he had got far enough from the inn, he drew rein, and proceeded at a gentler rate.

"Now, Noakes," he cried, exultingly, "what do you think of the aspect of affairs now? Have I not managed things cleverly, eh?"

"You have, Mr. Wild, indeed! Things look brighter now than they have done for a long time past."

"Yes. I should not feel surprised if we were to throw the officers off the track altogether. You must remember a long time has elapsed since we last saw or heard anything of them."

"Very true!"

"It is that which makes me hopeful."

"Do you still intend to carry out your original intention of getting into the heart of the country?"

"Yes, for I don't know what I can do better."

Mr. Noakes was silent, from which circumstances it may be surmised that he was quite agreeable that this plan should be adopted.

"We are very short of funds," added Wild, "but that is only a trifle. We can repair that inconvenience easily."

"Not very easily."

"Why not?"

"Because if you stop some one on the highway—and I

suppose that is your intention—it will at once ~~2576~~ the effect of putting the officers on the scent again."

"No—no! Long before they could communicate with any of them I should be far away. Hark! I thought then that I could hear the sound of horses' feet. Hark!"

Wild stopped his horse as he spoke, and his companion did so likewise.

Then most unmistakably there came upon their ears sounds which betokened the approach of a horseman.

"Some one is coming," said Wild.

"Yes, there's no doubt of that. But shall you stop him?"

"Yes, certainly! It would be folly to allow him to pass by."

"I would rather not."

"Then you shall not. In such affairs as these you are of no service. Draw back—conceal yourself as well as you can under the shadow of the hedge, and leave the traveller to me!"

Mr. Noakes hesitated.

"Go!" repeated the thief-taker, in a tone of voice that showed he was getting angry—"go, I say, and leave me here!"

Mr. Noakes knew better than to refuse, and so he obeyed his companion's mandate.

Wild remained perfectly still in the centre of the road, waiting for the traveller to approach.

The traveller seemed to notice Wild and his horse standing in the middle of the road, and he slightly slackened his pace.

"Hallo, friend!" he shouted, as he came nearer. "Can you tell me whether I am going right for Northwick? I don't know these cross-roads very well."

"Northwick?" repeated Wild, disguising his voice, and pretending to consider.

"Yes," said the traveller, unsuspectingly, and continuing to come closer.

"Northwick?" repeated Wild. "I know the name, and yet I am almost at a loss to tell you which way to go. Oh, yes! I remember!"

Just at this moment the traveller reined-in his horse beside Wild's.

The thief-taker saw that he was a young man of muscular build.

But he did not hesitate to attack him.

He had managed, as he thought, to get unsuspectingly side by side with him, and suddenly changing his voice, he exclaimed:

"Now, then, my fine fellow, hand over every valuable article you possess this moment, or I will blow your brains out!"

He produced a pistol as he spoke.

"No, you won't!" cried the traveller, with remarkable coolness. "I have got you at last! I know you, Jonathan Wild! You're my prisoner!"

So saying, the traveller, with a sudden movement, dashed the pistol from Wild's hand, and clutched him tightly by the throat.

So sudden and unexpected was all this, that Jonathan Wild was quite taken by surprise, and it was a moment or two before he could recover his ordinary self-possession.

"Surrender!" cried the traveller, sternly. "You are caught, and so you may as well give in with good grace! I have resolved to make you prisoner single-handed, and I have done it! You thought you could deceive me, did you not? But, instead, you have been deceived!"

"Curses on you!" exclaimed the thief-taker. "You'll understand that I'm not caught yet!"

With these words he grappled with the traveller, and a desperate struggle took place.

Wild was not long in making the discovery that this traveller was stronger than himself, and that he stood a good chance of getting the worst of it.

"Noakes!" he cried—"Noakes, you villain! Would you stop there and see me captured? Help—help, I say!"

"Ah! rascal, you are not alone, then!" exclaimed the traveller. "I must make short work with you!"

And as he spoke, he made a sudden and desperate effort to pull Wild out of the saddle.

But he failed.

"Shoot him!—stab him!" screamed Wild, at the top of his voice. "Be quick, or you will be too late!"

Tremblingly, Mr. Noakes advanced to take part in the contest.

Being well aware that anyone approaching from behind would attack him with great disadvantage to himself, the traveller was compelled, in self-defence, to release his hold of Jonathan Wild.

As soon as he was released, the thief-taker let go also.

The first thing he did was to draw another pistol and fire.

The shot was an effectual one, though it was by chance only, for he fired before he had time to take proper aim.

With a strange, gurgling cry, the traveller clasped both his hands over his face, and tumbled backwards from the saddle into the road.

Wild laughed hideously.

"You had made up your mind to capture me single-handed, had you?" he cried, mockingly. "Well, then, you deserve what you have got for your pains!"

Just then his eye fell upon Mr. Noakes, and his anger was suddenly kindled.

"Curses on you, you cowardly wretch!" he shouted. "You would have stood by and seen me captured without attempting to raise your hand in my defence!"

"You told me you didn't want me!" cried the Governor.

"As soon as you spoke and cried for help, I came!"

"Bah! You're a coward, and you know it! I think it would be a mercy if I were to send you to your account as well as this fool here!"

Wild had alighted from his steed, and as he spoke these last words he dealt the prostrate traveller a savage kick.

A groan followed.

"I must see what he has about him," he said. "I will make the adventure profitable, if I can."

Accordingly he stooped down, and began to rifle the traveller's pockets.

While thus engaged, he heard a sound which made him pause.

Mr. Noakes heard it at the same moment.

It was the heavy tramp of the officers' horses.

"D—n them!" yelled Wild, furiously. "They are still upon my track! Can I never elude them?"

"Mount—mount! Be quick!" cried Mr. Noakes.

"They are frightfully close at hand! If you hesitate, you will be unable to escape!"

"Keep your cowardly tongue between your teeth!" was the reply. "Do you think I'm going to leave this man here with money in his pockets, even if the officers are close at hand? Hold!" he continued, seeing that Mr. Noakes was about to take flight. "If you stir till I am ready, I will fire a bullet after you!"

In an agony of fright, Mr. Noakes stopped at once.

He could not despise the threat which had just been uttered.

There lay the traveller on the ground, and he knew that Jonathan would not scruple to shoot him also if he did not obey.

With nimble fingers, Jonathan Wild transferred the contents of the traveller's pockets to his own, and then mounted his steed.

By the time he had done this, the officers were very close at hand indeed.

"Forward!" he cried. "Make good speed! Our horses are fresh! We shall outrun them yet!"

At a wild gallop they dashed onwards.

As the reader already expects, the approaching officers were those who had stopped at the inn so shortly after the departure of the two fugitives.

They came on with great swiftness; but the one who was riding in advance caught sight of a horse standing still near the middle of the road.

He pointed the object out to his companions, and they began to reduce their speed.

Directly afterwards, they all formed a circle round the spot where the encounter we have just described had taken place.

Lying on the ground in quite a pool of blood was the young man who had made so courageous an attack upon the thief-taker.

"Hallo!" cried the chief officer. "This seems as though the rascals were not far off! Dismount, one of you! We must see to this!"

He sprang from his own horse as he spoke.

"What a lucky thing it was," he continued, after a momentary inspection, "that this horse stood still! Release the gentleman's foot from the stirrup! If his horse

had started off he would have been bruised to death on the road!"

This order was obeyed, and the movement caused by it made the traveller groan faintly.

"He isn't dead, then!" was the next remark. "Perhaps he may speak and tell us something!"

The traveller's hands were still clasped over his face, and so tightly, that the officer was not strong enough to remove them.

Finding this to be the case, he desisted from the attempt, and, bending his head down close to the wounded man's, he said:

"If you are able to speak, tell us who has wounded you thus!"

The traveller made a desperate effort to speak, and his struggles in consequence were frightful to witness.

But he failed to articulate a word.

"Was it Jonathan Wild?" suggested the chief officer.

The traveller uttered a gasping groan, which with difficulty might be construed into an affirmative.

"Has he gone down the road?"

There was another groan.

"Long ago?"

The traveller remained silent:

"Are you sure that it was Jonathan Wild?"

The traveller groaned again, and this time louder than before.

It was dreadful to witness his condition.

He lay there on the ground, sensible to all that was taking place around him, and able to hear all that was said, and to comprehend it; and he lay there, too, suffering the most exquisite torture that can be imagined.

Speak he could not, though he would have given much for the power to utter a few words.

"You had better remain here and see to the gentleman," said the chief officer, addressing the one who had dismounted. "In the meanwhile, we will continue the pursuit."

The condition of the hapless traveller produced a deep effect upon the officer in command.

"My lads," he said, "is this sort of thing to be permitted to go on? Shall such villains live? Forward!—follow me closely! They cannot be far off, and we shall have them yet!"

The officers uttered a responsive shout, and, plunging their spurs deep into their horses' flanks, renewed the chase after the fugitives with additional vigour.

CHAPTER DXLVII.

JONATHAN WILD HAS A HORRIBLE ADVENTURE AT THE TOLLGATE.

ALTHOUGH very little time was consumed by the officers' halt, it enabled Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes to get a considerable distance in advance.

The thief-taker heard them stop, and exclaimed:

"They have found the body on the road. They will examine it, of course. 'On—on with all speed! We must make the most we can of this opportunity!'"

The Governor did not reply, but kept as close behind his companion as he could.

Shortly, the sounds of hoof-beats in the rear struck distinctly upon their ears.

It was now that the excellence of the horses they had stolen made itself apparent, for the sounds behind, instead of increasing in loudness, grew fainter and fainter by degrees.

This encouraged Wild to urge them to still greater exertions.

Away they went at a headlong pace down the narrow, devious, lonely country lanes, luckily without meeting with a single person.

The landlord of the inn had certainly not exaggerated when he spoke of the value of the horses.

There were few, indeed, that could have equalled them in speed and endurance.

At last Jonathan commanded a halt.

Descending from the saddle, he laid himself down at full length upon the roadway, with his ear pressed closely to the earth.

Here he remained listening for some moments, and at last he rose with a chuckle of satisfaction.

"We've beat them again!" he cried, "I can't hear a

single sound, so they must be miles behind us at the very least! Now then to consider which road to take."

Wild remounted, and, standing in the stirrups, took a long and careful look about him.

On one side, a succession of large, smooth meadows stretched out as far as the eye could reach.

The first of them was only separated from the cross-road in which he stood by a low hedge, which the horses could easily overleap.

After some deliberation, he determined to take this course.

"Follow!" was all he said, and, at the same moment, he turned his horse round, and leaped into the meadow.

Mr. Noakes followed, but somehow or other, in descending on the opposite side, he lost his balance and fell heavily to the ground.

As the turf was soft, he sustained very little injury, and Jonathan, by stretching out his hand promptly, secured the steed, which otherwise would probably have run away.

Mr. Noakes lay perfectly still for several minutes, for the fall had knocked nearly all the breath out of his body.

A shout from the thief-taker, however, made him presently scramble to his feet, and he remounted.

"How did that happen?" asked Wild, with a derisive laugh. "Why didn't you stick on?"

Mr. Noakes held his peace.

He knew if he replied he should only lay himself open to the jeers and taunts of his companion.

With even greater speed than they had yet made, the horses galloped across these meadows, and in half an hour they had placed a considerable distance between them and the spot where Noakes had had his fall.

Jonathan began to feel much easier in his mind, and to think that for this time at least he had got quite clear of his foes.

By pushing on steadily into the interior of the country, he hoped to reach a spot where he could remain for a time unmolested.

At last the termination of the meadows was reached.

Wild pulled up, and found he was divided from a broad and level high-road by a stout, thickly-planted hedge.

He remained a little while looking about him and listening.

But a profound silence reigned all around, and the high-road was perfectly deserted.

"I think we cannot do better than push along there," he said, pointing with his finger. "It is certainly the best way we can take. What do you say to another leap over this hedge, eh, Noakes? If you fall, you will find the road harder than the turf!"

"Is there a gate?" growled Noakes.

"I don't know. Look and see."

"Yes—there's one a few yards lower down."

"We will go through that, then," said Wild, "for the horses might injure themselves in some way in taking the leap, and there is really no necessity for it."

Accordingly they passed through the gate Mr. Noakes had mentioned.

At what is termed a hand-gallop they pushed on along the high-road.

They travelled several miles, and all the way it preserved its deserted appearance.

They did not meet with or overtake a single traveller, nor did they once come within sight of a human habitation.

Presently, however, they saw something straight before them in the distance, which the darkness rendered confused and indistinct.

It was a mass of something white.

Upon closer approach it resolved itself into a toll-gate.

The toll-house adjoining it was built of wood, and painted white, as was the gate itself, so that the whole had a somewhat ghastly and ghostlike appearance.

The gate was shut.

Upon reaching it, Jonathan cried in a loud voice for the tollman, and, after a minute or two's delay, a nightcapped head was projected from a window.

"Open the gate!" roared Wild—"come down and open the gate! We are in a hurry!"

"Wait till your hurry's over, then!" growled the gate-keeper, as he slammed the window, and leisurely proceeded to dress himself.

Jonathan shouted and knocked, but all to no purpose.

At last the door opened, and the man came forth.

"Tuppence—tuppence!" he cried. "Give me the money before I let you through!"

"Here is a shilling," cried Wild. "Now be quick! Did it ever strike you that it might be something in your pocket if you were to make haste and open the gate when any gentleman came?"

"Mind your own business, and I'll mind mine!" was the surly response.

"Very well, then—open the gate!"

"I am agoin' to, ain't I? What a blessed hurry you must be in, to be sure!"

With a lantern in one hand and a key in the other, the tollman walked towards the gate for the purpose of unlocking it, but just then a cry arose of such a hideous and unearthly character, that he started back several paces in affright.

Mr. Noakes, too, was greatly terrified, as was evidenced by his white face and trembling limbs.

His horse, too, grew restive and unmanageable, and so did Jonathan Wild's, and the thief-taker himself was not a little discomposed by the suddenness with which this horrible cry had risen upon the night air.

All the blood in his veins seemed to rush all at once back to his heart, and when there to congeal and turn to ice.

Then the awful cry came again.

Instinctively the strange and little group turned their eyes in the direction from which it came.

Then they saw dimly revealed by the tollman's lantern something which looked like a human form.

The resemblance, however, was but very slight.

By accident more than design, the tollman raised his lantern, so that most of its beams fell upon this strange and weird figure.

As though fascinated, Jonathan Wild fixed his eyes upon it.

Like the witches in "Macbeth," it "looked not like an inhabitant o' the earth, but yet was on 't."

At first it could not be made out whether the figure was male or female.

The fluttering of some tattered garments in the wind seemed to show that it was a woman.

She came forward a step, and then sprang upward.

She seized hold of the top bar of the gate and clung to it with one arm, while with the other she pointed full in the countenance of the thief-taker.

She could now be seen with much greater plainness.

The loose flowing garments she had on were torn to shreds, and flapped against the woodwork to which she clung.

Her hair was long and matted, and of a silvery hue.

She was emaciated to the last degree, and the arm which she extended to the thief-taker was absolutely devoid of flesh.

The bones seemed to shine through the closely-fitting skin, so that the arm and hand appeared to belong to a skeleton, and not to a living creature.

When the tollkeeper saw all that we have just described, his terror naturally increased, and muttering something about a witch, he drew still further back.

As for Mr. Noakes, who was never stout-hearted, he was absolutely paralysed with fright, and from the manner in which he swung from side to side in the saddle, he appeared every instant about to fall to the earth.

And Jonathan Wild—that bold, bad, reckless man—was affected strangely by this hideous apparition.

He trembled from head to foot—the flesh seemed to creep upon his bones, while his heart beat so feebly that the blood flowed only sluggishly through its accustomed channels.

It was strange that such an effect should be produced upon such a man.

But, as we have before remarked, Jonathan Wild was superstitious, and, what was more, he recognised the horrible, unearthly-looking creature clinging to the gate.

In a shrieking tone of voice, the figure cried:

"Man of villany and blood, we have once more met! Again—again I warn you! Since we met you have had

many wonderful escapes! The end is coming, I see. It has been protracted, but it will surely come at last!"

"Peace!" roared Wild, making use, by a strong effort, of his powers of speech, and speaking in a tone so loud as to drown the voice of the weird woman.—"peace, hag! Begone, or I will slay you!"

A loud and hideous laugh was the only response that was made to this threat.

"I tell you the end is coming!" screamed the hag—"I tell you it is not far off! I see it always before me, in the darkness and in the daylight! I see the hangman's cart—I see the trembling wretch within it! I see the triple tree at Tyburn—the huge crowd—the executioner; and I see Jonathan Wild standing beneath the fatal beam! That's your fate! The death to which you have doomed so many poor and helpless ones—that death shall you die!"

A cold sweat burst out from every pore in Wild's body.

He was absolutely paralysed with fear.

Never, probably, in the whole course of his life had he been so overcome with superstitious terror as he was then.

"Do you hear me?" shrieked the hag again. "You tried to scoff and jeer when I warned you last; but since then remember what has happened! You are no longer in power, as you were then. Part is already accomplished, for you are a fugitive, and the officers are at your heels! You may struggle—you may try to get away; but all your struggles will avail you nothing, for you are doomed—doomed—DOOMED to be strangled on Tyburn Tree!"

Wild drew a long breath, and then, in a cracked, unnatural tone of voice, he cried:

"Begone—depart, or I will shoot you!"

"Ha, ha!"

Wild took a pistol in his hand, but he trembled so excessively with fright that he could not possibly have taken aim.

Actuated by a second thought, he turned the muzzle towards the trembling tollkeeper, and yelled:

"Open the gate—open the gate, villain, and let me through! Open the gate, or you are a dead man!"

"Off—off!" shrieked the hag, waving her skinny arm, as the tollkeeper, in obedience to Wild's commands, stepped forward a few paces. "Approach not, at your peril!"

It would seem that the tollman had more dread of the unknown powers of mischief possessed by the hag than he had of the pistol; for, although Wild still pointed it towards him, he stood still.

With an oath, the thief-taker raised his arm.

By a sudden effort, he levelled the pistol at the shadowy figure at the gate.

For half a second his hand was steady, and he took advantage of that instant to pull the trigger.

The report was terrific, and a cloud of smoke hid, for a few moments, all objects just in front from view.

Trembling with dread of he knew not what, Wild looked in the direction where the figure had been.

It was there no longer.

It had disappeared as suddenly and completely as the smoke caused by the explosion of the gunpowder, not a vestige of which could now be perceived curling up in the air.

Oh, what an exquisite relief it was to the terrified soul of that bad man when he found that his eyes no longer rested on that figure which had for him unnumbered terrors!

As if by the effect of enchantment, he suddenly recovered himself, and assumed his old demeanour.

With an angry yell, he turned round, and, fixing his eyes upon the gatekeeper, he said:

"Villain, it is through your stupidity that all this has taken place! Open the gate, or, so surely as you now live, I will blow your brains out if you hesitate or refuse!"

There could be no mistaking the terrible earnestness of Wild's tones; and though he was in an extremity of fright, the tollman hastened to obey this command.

He scarcely dared to turn his eyes towards the spot where the old hag had been.

He fully expected to see her lying at his feet weltering in blood.

But, to his surprise, not a trace of her remained; she had disappeared completely.

Reassured by this, his hand grew steadier, and thrusting the key into the lock, he turned it and pushed the gate open.

No sooner did it recede upon its hinges, than Jonathan Wild plunged the spurs deeply into his horse's sides and dashed by.

Mr. Noakes followed, or rather his horse, for he was incapable of guiding him in the least.

But both creatures were greatly terrified, and it seemed a relief to them to gallop along the broad highway at the very top of their speed.

CHAPTER DXLVIII.

RETURNS TO GEORGE WILD, AND DESCRIBES HOW HE FARED WITH THE TWENTY-FOUR THOUSAND POUNDS.

IN following uninterruptedly the fortunes of Jonathan Wild, and his companion in crime, Mr. Noakes, the late Governor of Newgate, we have, of necessity, lost sight, for a considerable period, of the other characters in this history, in whose fate, it is presumed, the reader feels the greatest possible amount of interest.

So long a time has elapsed since a word has been said about either of the other personages, that it is necessary for us to take a retrospective glance, and call to mind the exact positions in which they were last placed.

First, then, there are Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

It will be remembered that when we saw them last was when they were seated in a carriage along with the Lord Chancellor.

This was after they had made a full disclosure of all they knew respecting Edgworth Bess, and after they had, to some extent, established her claim to the name of Donnull.

Then Edgworth Bess herself, who was last left in that house in an obscure street in Westminster, where she was waiting anxiously for the return of her two friends.

Then there is another character of whom for a long while we have heard nothing, but who some time back figured somewhat prominently in these pages.

It is to this character and to his proceedings that we intend first of all to turn, as they were productive of serious consequences, as will be quickly seen.

We allude to George Wild, that bad son of a bad father.

He inherited all the vices and villany of his parent, without one redeeming qualification.

A more thoroughly heartless wretch than Wild junior it could be scarcely possible for the imagination to conceive.

He was of so base and treacherous a disposition that he could not by any possibility deal straightforwardly and fairly with anyone.

Although so many events have been since described, the reader will be able to remember how Jonathan Wild forgave the former misdoings of his son, and took him entirely into his confidence.

It will also be remembered how from the first George Wild had studied the means by which he could defeat his father, and reap the whole benefit of his nefarious schemes himself.

Partially he failed, but to a very great extent he was successful.

We allude now to his transaction at the bank.

He had discovered what the thief-taker imagined to be a secret locked within his breast, and George Wild, as soon as he found things were going wrong, drew out the whole of this money without the least remorse, and absconded with it, leaving his father to manage as best he could.

Elated with joy at obtaining so much money with so little trouble, Wild junior, as soon as he quitted the bank, made up his mind to leave England for ever in the smallest possible space of time.

At the time of which we write, however, this was not done so easily and so quickly as at the present day.

Two courses were open to him.

He might take his place in a Dover coach, and travel to the sea coast in that way; and the other was to ride as far as Gravesend, and get on board a vessel there that would take him at once to his destination.

After some hesitation, he resolved to adopt this last-mentioned mode of proceeding.

Indeed, believing that he was less likely to be noticed on water than on land, he took passage in a small boat as far as Gravesend.

Here he embarked on what was considered in those days a fast-sailing vessel, which was bound for the port of Lisbon.

It mattered little to him where he went, so long as it was out of England; and when he placed his foot upon the deck of the clumsy bark, a feeling of great exultation came over him, for he fully believed that he had entirely accomplished his design.

The twenty-four thousand pounds he had all safe enough in his pocket, and with such an amount as that, he knew very well he could live like a prince for the remainder of his days in any foreign land.

The prospect before him was truly a delightful one, and the rascal amused himself by speculating on all his future proceedings.

With the first favourable wind that sprang up, the vessel dropped down the river to Sheerness.

Afterwards it stood fairly out to sea, and when Wild junior saw the white cliffs of England receding from his view, he made doubly sure that all was well.

For the first day or two he found his voyage pleasant enough.

All objects were quite fresh, and his thoughts were busy.

But after that time, the monotony of life on board ship began to tell seriously upon him.

He could no longer enjoy his own thoughts as much. Strive as he would, he could not fix them upon the future, but they pertinaciously reverted to the past.

And in that past there was nothing that he could remember with any degree of satisfaction.

In this extremity, he began to look around him at the different faces on board, in search of some one that he could make a companion of.

He first of all made advances to the captain, but in this direction he met with no success.

This probably was because the captain was a bluff, open-hearted man, and certainly not the character to associate with one of George Wild's stamp.

One evening, as he was sitting upon the deck, whiling away the time with a pipe, the steward accosted him.

What qualification it was that had gained for this man his present situation we cannot say, but certainly it was not his good looks.

Indeed, a more repulsive countenance than he possessed could scarcely have been found.

He had thick lips and large projecting teeth; his eyes were deeply sunk into his head, and overhung with huge shaggy eyebrows, and his forehead receded in a manner that looked very strange when his hat was off.

Wild junior was glad enough to take advantage of the opportunity of joining in conversation, and as they stood together they certainly seemed a fitting pair.

"I should think you are tired of being on deck staring about," said the steward—"you look so, at any rate."

"I am," was the reply; "but what else am I to do? Where can I go?"

"Well, there's my room," replied the steward. "You might find it a change to go down there. We might be able to amuse ourselves."

"How so?"

"Oh, in many ways!" was the evasive answer.

"Now, look here," said Wild—"I want something to occupy my mind. Have you got any cards with you?"

The steward's eyes brightened as he answered:

"I have an old pack, not quite complete. It's done good service in its time. I'll try and find them for you, if you like."

"Good! Then we will have a game together."

With these words the two men descended to the steward's room.

After some search the cards were found, and at the same time a large can of grog was placed upon the table.

"Ah, this is something like!" said Wild junior, as he shuffled the cards. "I never thought about this before. The time will pass pleasantly enough, for if the stakes are moderate, you can never get tired of playing at cards."

"I am fond of a hand now and then myself," said the steward, "though I can't get much opportunity."

"I suppose not."

"Nor have I much money to spare, so you must be content to play for low stakes."

"As you will," replied George. "Low or high, it makes no difference to me."

Matters being thus arranged, a guinea was placed upon the table, and the game began.

Gambling was just the kind of vice in which such a one as George Wild would be likely to indulge.

And the only wonder is he did not think of it earlier.

Game followed game with varying results.

After a time, Wild junior got to his last guinea.

He had to get change for a five-pound note, in order to lay down his next stake.

He pulled one of the little rolls from his pocket, which, though it did not represent one twentieth part of the money he had about him, was yet sufficient to make the steward's eyes sparkle with avarice.

No remark was made by him, however.

He took the note, examined it, and placed it in his pocket.

But, after the grog-can had been for the second time replenished, the steward ventured to remark:

"I suppose, sir, that you are going abroad entirely for your own pleasure?"

"Oh yes, entirely!" said George. "I intend to travel about from one foreign place to another, and enjoy myself."

"Ah, such a thing as that must be very pleasant indeed, providing you only have the means!"

"Very," replied George—"very!"

"I have often wished," continued the steward, "that I had had the opportunity; but some are lucky, and others the reverse. Now, I have had to spend nearly all my life on board ship."

Wild junior only nodded, and went on with his game.

"You will find it an expensive thing to follow up," pursued the steward, anxious to obtain all the information he could.

"It won't reach the bottom of my pocket, nohow," said George, in reply.

"Then it's a deep one," mentally remarked the steward. The conversation was then changed, and the play proceeded.

At last, in sheer disgust at his ill-luck, Wild junior threw down the cards and left the steward's room, some twenty pounds poorer than he was when he entered it.

"D—n him for a cheat!" he muttered, in a thick voice, as he retired to his own berth. "He must have cheated me! I'll play no more; I was a fool to begin it! There's no end to gambling, and if I have ever so much money it will soon all melt away!"

This was a prudent resolution, but one that has been taken over and over again by those who have once yielded themselves up to the fascination of play.

True to his determination, George Wild on the following day kept as clear of the steward as he could, and amused himself in the best manner he was able.

But as evening came on the old weariness returned.

It was then that the steward approached him again.

At first Wild junior resolutely refused to accompany him to his cabin, but in a few minutes the temptation became too strong for him to resist.

Once again, then, he seated himself at the table, and the play began.

The first can of grog was disposed of, and another mixed by the steward.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, during which George, in his excitement, had drunk rather deeply of the grog.

The steward's glass was before him on the table, untouched.

"D—n it, man," he cried, "why don't you drink?"

The steward licked his lips and glanced furtively at George under his shaggy brows.

"I can't drink when I am winning! Fortune is again on my side!"

"Yes, d—n her for a jade!" replied Wild, in a voice which was thick and husky. "I am in ill-luck again to-night!"

"Play!" cried the steward, and once more the stakes were placed upon the table.

Another game was played, and this time Wild junior won.

Delighted with his success, and believing the tables



[JACK SHEPPARD IS FILLED WITH DISAPPOINTMENT AND DESPAIR.]

were about to turn, he entered into the game with fresh spirit.

But his brain began to grow confused in spite of all his efforts to concentrate his ideas.

"D—n it! what's this?" he cried, placing his hand to his forehead. "My head turns round like a top!"

"You've laid in too much grog," said the steward, with a sinister smile.

"That be d—d!" was the almost inarticulate reply. "I could drink four times as much without feeling as I do now! Curse me! I—half suspect—that—"

George struggled painfully to his feet. But just then the vessel gave a sudden lurch, and he fell down, striking his head with great violence against a locker.

He became insensible at once.

The steward rose, and approached him with a stealthy step.

No. 117.—BLUESKIN.

"That's done the business!" was his exclamation. "I thought I was going to have some trouble with him; but he's right enough now! He began to suspect before he had drunk grog enough; but that topper on his head-piece has made up for all!"

Wild junior lay like one dead on the floor of the steward's cabin.

Cautiously the steward went to the door, and secured it in the best way he was able.

Then he returned to the prostrate form and bent over it.

"Now my dream will be realised," he muttered in an excited voice. "What I have hoped for and longed for for this twenty years is within my reach! He has money—heaps of money! No doubt the greatest part of it is about his person. I don't believe that he came honestly by the money, no matter how much it is; but what's that to me? Nothing—nothing at all! I will have it!"

With trembling fingers the steward began to search in the pockets of George Wild.

Roll after roll of bank-notes was produced, and each one that he handled only served to increase the excitement of the plunderer.

"Oh, what a fortune is here!" he exclaimed. "Thousands upon thousands! Now I am rich! I will keep all this wealth a secret, and the first time we touch the land I'll desert the ship. Yes, I am rich! And now to dispose of this rascal!"

While speaking these words, the steward had carefully possessed himself of all the valuables which Wild junior carried about him, and having made them up into one large parcel, deposited it in his sea-chest.

Then, going to the door of his cabin, he listened, in order to ascertain whether anyone was near.

But, with the exception of the watch on deck, everybody in the ship had retired to rest, so there was no likelihood of his villainous scheme being interfered with.

It was a cold-blooded, treacherous deed that he had perpetrated and was about to bring to a consummation, though, of course, none of our readers can pity such a one as George Wild.

Having secured his ill-gotten wealth, all that remained for him to do was to get rid of the body, and how he did this we will now proceed to relate.

CHAPTER DXLIX.

DESCRIBES WHAT THE STEWARD DID WITH THE BODY OF WILD JUNIOR.

THE reader no doubt suspects the true reason of the sudden stupor which seized upon George Wild.

It was not owing to the quantity of strong grog he had drunk, for his constitution was so well seasoned that he could have imbibed a much greater quantity with impunity.

It was because the steward had mixed with the second can a drug which he had stolen out of the medicine chest in the surgeon's room.

His motive for doing this deed is also self-evident.

It was in order to obtain possession of the money George carried about with him.

Not that the steward by any means expected that Wild junior had about his person so large a sum as twenty-four thousand pounds, though, from the sight of the roll of bank-notes, and from the manner in which George had behaved, the steward came to the conclusion that the amount was considerable.

All his life he had been a needy man.

As he had said himself, he had been compelled to spend most of his time on the ocean.

Not that he by any means liked a seafaring life.

Quite the reverse.

But it was the only course open to him by which he could gain employment, for on shore his character was about as bad as anyone's could be.

With regard to his poverty, however.

This was not because he did not earn good wages. He always received a large sum at the conclusion of every voyage, but it vanished in no time—so that, in order to obtain the necessities of life, he was obliged to go on board ship again.

It was always with regret, however, that he left his native land.

Unfortunately for one in his position in life, he possessed extravagant and luxurious tastes, and he did not care so long as these were gratified.

Villainous and unscrupulous in disposition, and desiring wealth above all other things, he did not hesitate to commit murder in order to obtain it.

With this explanation we resume.

George was now insensible and unable to make the least resistance, so it is not to be supposed that the steward would have any great difficulty in disposing of him.

He crossed his cabin, and drew back the shutter which covered an opening in the ship's side, made for the purpose of allowing fresh air to enter when the sea was calm.

The spray dashed in, but, unheeding of this, the steward crept towards the spot where his victim lay at full length.

Seizing George by the arms, he dragged him along the floor, and then, by a sudden exertion of strength, raised him up, and thrust him through the porthole.

Had it been the result of magic, the disappearance of George Wild could not have been more sudden than it was.

The steward closed the shutter again.

His lips were white, and there was a strange look about his eyes.

In a trembling voice, he said:

"That's over—it is all over now! I shall never be troubled with him any more! He is gone, and the money is mine!"

He looked about him carefully, in order to get rid of any trace that might remain of the villainous deed that he had committed.

In falling against the sharp edge of the locker, George had cut his head slightly, so that on the floor there were a few drops of blood.

These were easily enough removed.

With the steward, however, we have at present no more to do.

We must return to Wild junior.

There is an old proverb which says that "the man who is born to be hanged can never be drowned," and this seemed to be the case with George Wild; for in what other manner could his miraculous escape be accounted for?

The sudden shock which the immersion in the cold water produced, partially restored him to his senses.

His brain was confused. He had no clear idea of where he was or what he was about.

But, with the instinct of self-preservation, he struck out, and sustained his head above water.

The fall against the locker was a most favourable circumstance for him, so far as the preservation of his life was concerned.

The amount of blood he had lost was just about sufficient to counteract the effects of the narcotic that had been administered to him in the grog.

It will be remembered that the steward at first fancied his victim had not drunk enough to produce the desired effect; and this was actually the case, for Wild's suspicions were aroused just in time to save himself.

The sudden plunge into the cold water, then, combined with the loss of blood from his head, had the effect of restoring him to consciousness.

By degrees the conviction dawned upon him that he was floating on the ocean.

How he came to be in his present position was a profound mystery.

As his intellects gradually recovered their proper use, he looked around him, as well as the darkness of the night would permit.

Just visible as a dusky mass of something was the ship in which he had embarked.

Even as he gazed upon it, its outline became blurred and indistinct, and he lost sight of it altogether.

Truly was his position now a perilous one.

Alone on the ocean, with nothing to support himself with save his own muscles, and he knew that in a little while they would tire.

He was weak, too, and not in a condition to make much exertion.

Therefore he did nothing but attempt to keep himself afloat on the surface of the water.

He was miles and miles away from land, and it was folly for him to think of making the attempt to swim towards it.

He would only exhaust himself if he tried to do it.

Of all this George Wild was conscious.

He shouted aloud and screamed for help, in the hope that his voice might be carried to friendly ears; but there was no prospect of coming help, and presently, hoarse and tired, he became silent.

Then his ever active brain went to work to solve what was at present an inscrutable problem.

How came he in the water?

He fixed his recollections upon one point which he could distinctly remember.

This was, accompanying the steward to his cabin, and playing at cards.

By many severe mental efforts he then managed to call to mind, little by little, everything that had taken place

up to the moment when the conviction came upon him that he had been drugged.

He could remember trying to stand upon his feet, and failing in the attempt.

Of course, after that, everything was a total blank.

The next thing he could remember was being in the water.

He tried in vain to fill up the gap by memory, and at last he endeavoured to do it by speculation.

Wild junior got so far, and then another thought presented itself to his imagination, of so horrible a character that it seemed to paralyse all his faculties, mental and physical.

"It's that steward!" he thought; "I know d—d well it is! He's drugged me, and thrown me overboard!"

Up to this moment he had not suspected that he had been robbed of all the wealth he carried about him.

Now, however, in seeking for a motive for the steward's behaviour, it was suggested to him.

While in his present situation, of course he could not conveniently ascertain whether his money was still safe or not.

But the more he thought, the more certain did he feel that all had been taken from him, and that he had not a penny left.

Such an effect did this produce upon him, that he almost felt as though he could then and there abandon all attempts to save his life, and quietly sink to the bottom of the ocean.

What could he do now that, by one stroke, he had been robbed of all that which he had earned with so much skill and trouble?

Of what use would life be to him without the twenty-four thousand pounds?

This despairing feeling began at length to pass away.

He strove hard to buoy himself up with the hope that things were not so bad as they seemed to be.

"He may have taken some," he said, "but surely not all my wealth!"

This was a forlorn hope, but still it served to sustain him. Just then he felt some object strike against him with considerable violence—indeed, he could not refrain from uttering a cry of pain.

He looked around.

It was some dark, black object floating on the surface of the billows, which had come in contact with him.

No sooner did he make this discovery than the hope sprang up in his breast that, if he could overtake this object, whatever it was, and seize hold of it, it would enable him to sustain himself upon the water with much less exertion than he had hitherto been compelled to make.

The occurrence of this thought and the endeavour to get hold of this floating object were simultaneous.

It was a difficult undertaking, and several times it slipped through his fingers when he thought he had secured it.

But he had every incentive to make repeated trials, and at length, when almost overpowered, he succeeded.

The floating object was a small cask, which will at once account for the difficulty there was in grasping it.

It was light and buoyant, and while he could keep hold of it, there was no fear of his sinking.

He clung to it with both hands.

His head was easily sustained above the water, and he was drifted onwards and onwards by the billows, he knew not whither.

When he was thrown overboard, the night was already far advanced, and yet it seemed to Wild junior that the morning would never come.

But, with their accustomed speed, the hours passed by, and morning broke upon the ocean.

Then the sun rose, and as soon as he was able to do so, George took a long look about him, in the hope of being able either to catch sight of the land or of some approaching vessel.

But he was disappointed.

From his position, his head being on a level with the water, he could not command a very extensive view; in fact, it was only when he was sustained for a moment by the crest of some swelling billow that he was able to see at all.

He strained his eyes, and looked around him in all directions.

But the result was the same.

Nothing but water was around him on all sides.

During the long hours of darkness, George had buoyed himself up with the hope that, as soon as ever the sun rose, he should be able to see some vessel.

Now that he was deceived in this expectation, his heart sank with despair.

He felt almost inclined to abandon all effort to prolong his life.

He was fearfully exhausted by his buffetings with the waves, and his arms, clasped round the cask, and retained in one position so long, got terribly cramped, and he was afraid each moment that he should have to let go his hold.

He was, moreover, sick and faint from the effects of the drug.

By-and-by he began to wonder whether this cask to which he clung contained anything or was empty.

He fancied the former would prove to be the case, more especially from the size and appearance of the cask, which he set down at once as being a brandy keg.

If so, his encounter with it would indeed be a most fortunate circumstance.

How was he to ascertain it? and, supposing it to be filled with spirits, how was he to partake of any of it?

He knew that he had a large knife in his pocket; but then, how was he to take it out, and at the same time retain his hold?

At length he decided upon the somewhat hazardous experiment of supporting himself with one hand and arm alone, while with the other he attempted to take the knife from his pocket.

He succeeded better than he had dared to anticipate.

He took out the knife, and held it with a tenacious grip; for if he once let go, it would sink to the bottom of the ocean and be entirely beyond recovery.

The knife was closed, of course; but this was no great difficulty.

With his teeth he pulled open the large blade, and then, with one arm encircling the cask, he set to work to cut a small hole in the side.

This was a long and tedious operation, but yet it had a beneficial effect, for the time seemed to pass away more quickly.

Every now and then he would pause in his work, and look around him, but at last he grew disheartened, for the result was always the same.

After more than an hour's labour, consequent upon the awkwardness of his position, he managed to cut a small hole completely through the cask.

Through this hole, to his joy, he then saw some dark fluid slowly oozing.

That it was brandy he firmly believed, and congratulated himself upon his caution in having made the hole so small that it could not escape in any large quantity.

He restored the knife to his pocket, and after many efforts, placed his lips over the hole.

His heart bounded with joy.

It was indeed brandy, and he drank a considerable quantity.

The fiery beverage endued him with a spririous and fleeting kind of strength.

It banished for a time all those despairing feelings which had found a home in his heart, and he looked about him more hopefully and in better spirits than he had yet done.

He believed he must be dreaming, or that the liquor had produced an extraordinary effect upon him, for in one direction he could count no less than seven vessels and nearly all of them of large size.

He closed his eyes, believing this to be some delusion of his senses, but he opened them and was convinced that what he saw was real.

The ships were all at a short distance from each other, and going in the same direction.

Wild junior's heart beat fast as he wondered what means he could adopt to make those on board aware of his perilous situation.

They were a long way off yet, and he could scarcely decide in his own mind whether they were approaching him or not.

To have shouted aloud would have been vain.

He knew it, and was silent.

All that lay in his power was to fix his eyes upon the

vessels, straining his vision to the utmost, in order to make quite sure whether they were coming nearer to him or not.

CHAPTER DL.

GEORGE WILD HAS ANOTHER NARROW ESCAPE FROM A WATERY GRAVE.

AN hour passed away, and at the expiration of that time the seven vessels had sensibly diminished in size.

For a long time George Wild had been aware that the vessels were going further away from him, but he blinded himself from this knowledge as long as he was able.

At last he was unable to delude himself with this idea any longer, and broke forth into a torrent of vain and useless imprecations.

Then he applied himself afresh to the brandy keg, and so the day passed away, and darkness once more covered the deep.

Now Wild junior began to feel severely the want of sleep.

Yet he dared not close his eyes, for fear his slumber should grow profound, in which case he would probably let the cask slip out of his arms.

Still, strive as he would, in the long hours of the night his eyes would gradually close, and he would fall off into a slight, uneasy slumber.

Then he would suddenly awake with a start, as he fancied he was about to lose the cask.

Without it he felt he could not for any length of time preserve himself upon the surface of the water—these few staves of wood alone connected him with life.

No incident of any particular moment occurred during the whole of the night, and the sun, when it rose, found Wild junior in a terrible condition.

He suffered greatly from the want of sleep—he was hungry and thirsty, too.

A kind of delirium caused by drinking the strong brandy had taken possession of his brain.

He was so frightfully weak that he could scarcely raise himself up by the aid of the cask, so as to be able to look around him.

He felt quite certain that he could not possibly survive many hours longer, and, unless help came, and very speedily, he should perish.

The water by degrees grew calmer than it had been since the time of his immersion, and consequently he was able to see still further around him.

A hideous, shrieking cry burst from his lips as he saw not far off a small, clumsy-looking vessel.

He believed it was near enough for his voice to reach those on board, and he continued to scream out incessantly.

No notice, however, of his cries seemed to be taken.

It was necessary, then, that he should adopt some means of attracting their attention.

After a moment's thought, he altered his position slightly, and held the cask with one hand.

With the other he took off his white neckcloth.

This he raised in the air as high as he possibly could, and waved it repeatedly.

This signal was more effective than the other, though he was just beginning to give up in despair, when he heard an answering shout from those on board the little vessel.

He was seen, and the knowledge came upon him with such an overpowering effect that he almost lost his senses.

Then there was an interval, which seemed an age, that was occupied by the boat making its way towards him.

It was only a little fishing boat, such as are never seen except within a short distance of the shores of England.

But Wild junior was not in a state of body or mind to notice this.

It was a ship, and that was enough.

With much difficulty he was got on board.

He was almost insensible, and yet he managed to gasp out:

"The cask—the cask! Get that too—it is full of brandy!"

There was an immediate commotion among the fishermen on board the little bark, and they all looked eagerly after the prize.

The cask was soon got on board, and then prompt steps were taken to recover Wild junior.

He got better rapidly, and as soon as he was able to do so, he related the events which had befallen him.

In reply, he was told that the little vessel to which he owed his preservation happened to be in her present situation by mere chance.

The wind which had sprung up some hours before had carried her out of her course, and they were now so far away from the land that they were apprehensive whether they should ever be able to reach it again.

"It all depends upon the weather," said the owner of the vessel, who was in command of it. "If the wind is fair, all will be well—if not, we shall go to Davy Jones's locker!"

This was not reassuring intelligence, but the worst was conveyed by it.

After having depended for so long upon nothing better than a brandy keg to save him from drowning, the fishing-boat seemed to George Wild an ark of safety, so he troubled himself very little about the communication the master fisherman had made.

He was also in a terribly exhausted condition, and not fit to take an interest in anything.

Food was administered to him, however, and before many hours had elapsed he was almost himself again.

But such a change had come over Wild junior as quite defies any description.

Perhaps the reader can imagine what would be his feelings when he found his worst forebodings realised, and that of the large sum of money he had with him not even the smallest coin now remained.

His cursing and blaspheming was truly awful to listen to, and more than once the master of the vessel, who was not a little alarmed at their critical position, besought him to be silent, lest their vessel should be lost.

But these solicitations at first only made Wild junior more violent than ever, and it was not until they all threatened to heave him overboard again that he became quiet.

Oh! how he longed to have revenge upon the villainous steward, and how he imprecated his own folly and blindness in having fallen so easily into the snare laid for him!

He was able to call philosophy enough to his aid to be aware that all regrets were perfectly useless now.

He must, in a manner of speaking, begin life afresh, but there is little hope that any amendment will be perceived in it.

He learned with satisfaction from the master of the boat that they were making their way in as direct a line as possible to Portsmouth.

This landing-place would suit Wild junior excellently, because he should be able to get to London readily.

It was towards the latter place that his thoughts immediately turned, that being the only place that was large enough for the exercise of his talents, and the only place where he could hope to repair his severe loss.

It was hard to bring himself to think that he had all his schemes to go over again; but, like his father, George possessed an indomitable will, and did not suffer himself to be cast down by the misfortune that had come upon him.

Perhaps this was because he could so clearly see that he was greatly to blame himself.

The clumsy bark made but slight progress through the water; and on the following day George strained his eyes to the utmost, but failed to perceive any indication of land.

He was assured by the master, however, that England was not far off.

As the day advanced, the weather began to present an unfavourable aspect.

The clouds in the sky above formed themselves into dense masses.

The wind howled with a peculiar and mournful cadence among the masts and rigging.

The sea rose and fell, and there was every token of the approach of a severe storm.

This was what the master had all along dreaded.

"All is lost, I fear!" he said, addressing George.

"Why so?"

"This little vessel of mine, after the injuries she has already sustained, could never weather through a storm."

"Let us hope that it may be nothing serious," said George.

The master shook his head, and went away, in order to see that every preparation should be made.

His prognostications were quite correct.

Just after sunset, a terrific storm broke out.

Until then, George Wild had no idea of what a storm at sea was like.

He was terrified.

Every moment seemed as though it would surely be his last.

The timbers in the little bark groaned and creaked, and every sea broke over her.

By the advice of the master, George Wild allowed himself to be securely lashed to the mast.

But for this precaution, he would certainly have been swept away.

Several of the crew, who had secured themselves in the best way they were able, were washed overboard.

The man at the helm was lashed there, and the captain clung tightly to the iron windlass on deck.

But the storm showed no signs of abatement; on the contrary, its violence increased.

Then one wave, larger, and heavier, and stronger than any Wild junior had seen, or had been able to form the least conception of, came rolling towards them like a huge wall of water.

It burst upon the deck.

No vessel, however well-constructed, could stand such a shock as that.

George Wild had the sensation of being overwhelmed with water, and the next thing he was conscious of was that he was struggling in the waves.

Of the bark and its occupants not a single trace remained.

He had good cause to congratulate himself upon having followed the captain's advice.

The ropes which had been bound round his body still held him to the mast, and the huge piece of wood kept him afloat easily.

"I'm doomed to be drowned!" he thought, and prepared to resign himself to his fate, which he believed was inevitable.

He struggled no longer, but lay quite still.

As it turned out, this was the best thing he could do under the circumstances.

His head was above the water, and the force of the wind and waves drifted him rapidly onwards, but whither he knew not.

If landward, then there was some chance of escape; if seaward, he was lost.

In his present position, Wild junior was quite at a loss to ascertain in which of these two directions he was going.

He remained in a horrible state of anxiety and dread.

Throughout the whole of that night the storm raged; and although it abated towards daybreak, yet when the sun rose the ocean was rough and turbulent.

With much pain and difficulty, for he was numbed and cramped with exposure to the cold, George raised himself slightly.

He took advantage of a time when he was high up on a billow to look about him.

A cry of joy and surprise burst from his lips.

The land seemed within half a mile of him.

But he lost sight of it in an instant, as the piece of wood to which he was attached sank down into the trough of the sea.

When he rose again, he believed himself nearer, and such was really the case.

It seemed to him to take a tedious time to go over such a little distance; but there was no means by which he could increase his speed, for, in his present exhausted condition, it would have been folly on his part to have made the attempt to swim ashore.

At last, however, about noon, he found himself so close to the land that he could touch the bottom with his feet.

Then he tried to release himself from the mast to which he had been bound.

But the fishermen had performed their task too well.

He could not separate himself from it.

Consequently, he was forced to resign himself to the

action of the waves, and it was fortunate the beach upon which he was cast was of a sandy character.

Had it been rocks, he must have been dashed to pieces.

As it was, he was severely bruised; and, at length, so greatly did his suffering increase—as he was first drifted on to the sand, and then washed back again—that he became insensible.

When he opened his eyes again, and became conscious of existence, he found that the waves had washed him high up on the beach, and there left him.

He was in a most awkward position, and the wet ropes pained him exceedingly.

As well as he could he looked around him, but he appeared to be on a very lonely part of the coast.

There was not so much as a fisherman's cottage in sight.

Under these circumstances, he was forced to rely upon his own exertions for success.

After infinite toil, he succeeded in releasing himself.

He was then so tired, and cramped, and stiff, as scarcely to be able to move a muscle or a joint.

Mechanically his eyes wandered over the huge expanse of water presented to his gaze, and as he did so an angry cry rose to his lips.

Then, in something like his own tone and manner, he muttered:

"If I trust myself on the sea again, may I be d—d! I am on land at last, and nothing shall compel me to quit it!"

The tightness of the ropes had, to a very great extent, impeded the circulation of his blood.

Now that they were removed, however, he rapidly experienced a change for the better.

In a little while he was able to rise, and then to walk.

He had scarcely any portable articles with him save his clothes.

That he was penniless the reader has already been informed.

He was famished, too, and his mouth, from the quantity of salt water which had forced itself down his throat, was dry and parched.

"I must find some place of shelter!" he said. "And yet, where am I to look for it while in this state of poverty? I must beg!"

He seemed to have a weary journey before him, for, although he scanned the beach for many miles up and down, he was unable to catch a glimpse of the meanest habitation.

He had no resource but to bend his steps landward.

Presently, in the distance, he perceived a house of large and pretending appearance, which stood alone in the centre of extensive grounds.

The place had evidently been lately built.

As it was the only habitation in sight, George Wild was forced to make his way towards it, there to solicit assistance and support.

Upon drawing nearer, he found that the large gates leading into the grounds were closed and fastened.

A strong wooden fence enclosed the house and grounds, and, in his present enfeebled state, George knew that it would be foolish for him to attempt to climb over it.

He was almost in despair, when he happened to perceive the handle of a bell.

It was almost beyond his reach, and it was in consequence of it being so high up that it had escaped his notice.

With a last effort of strength, he stretched his arm as high above his head as he could, and grasped it.

A loud, clanging sound immediately followed, and, breathless and exhausted, he waited for a response to his summons.

CHAPTER DLI.

WILD JUNIOR PROVES HIMSELF TO BE A MONSTER OF INGRATITUDE.

His brain spun round and round, and he fancied for a time that existence was slipping from him.

Remembering where he was and what he had to do enabled him, however, to recover himself, though it cost a severe effort.

Then the doors were unclosed, and he heard a voice say, in kindly tones:

"Who is it, Reuben—who is it?"

"A poor, miserable-looking object, sir!" was the reply.

"He looks like a drowned dead rat!"

"Help—help!" cried George Wild, faintly—"help me, or I shall die at your gates!"

"Die at my gates?" said the kindly voice again—"die at my gates? Oh, good gracious!—the idea of such a thing! Help him in, Reuben—help him in! He shall be properly attended to! Cheer up, my good fellow!" he added, addressing Wild in the same pleasant voice. "Be of good heart! You shall not perish, if it lies in my power to save you!"

"Thanks—thanks!" said George, more faintly than before.

The man Reuben was employed by the owner of the house to perform a multitude of services, among which, answering the gate was one.

"What shall I do with him, sir?" he asked, addressing the white-haired, benevolent-looking old gentleman who stood by his side, and who was the owner and occupier of the house beyond. "Where shall I put him, sir?"

"Take him up to the house, of course—take him up to the house!"

"If you will assist me a little," said George, "I can walk; but I am very weak! I have been face to face with death!"

"You look as if you had," said the old gentleman. "But come along—all's right now!"

His words produced a soothing effect upon Wild junior, and served also to infuse additional strength into his enfeebled limbs; and, with more firmness and ease than could have been expected, he walked slowly along the broad, winding path that led from the gates up to the front door of the house.

The old gentleman followed close behind, with compassion and love for all his fellow-creatures in distress beaming from his face.

Long before the front door was reached, it was thrown open, and an old lady, who seemed the fitting and worthy mate of such a one as the old gentleman, made her appearance.

Several servants followed her.

There was no necessity for her to ask a single question.

No one knew her husband's charitable disposition better than she did herself.

One glance at the pallid, trembling, wet figure, supported by Reuben, was a sufficient explanation.

No one in distress or want ever presented themselves at those large gates and went away unrelieved.

By the assistance of the domestics, George Wild was carried into the house and placed in a bed.

Every possible attention was paid to him, and no effort was spared to recover him from his dreadful condition.

As it was little else than hunger, thirst, and the effects of being so long exposed to cold and wet that ailed George Wild, and as he was naturally of a strong constitution, he soon got better.

On the next day he was well enough to get up and walk about, though he was still feeble to a degree.

Every possible kind of nourishment was forced upon him by the hospitable inmates of the house, and George Wild had good cause to rejoice that fortune had been so kind to him as to throw him in the way of two such people as these were.

At their request, he gave a full account of all his sufferings.

It was not quite true, but nearly so.

For instance, he did not say that by a base stratagem he had obtained possession of twenty-four thousand pounds belonging to his father, and had fled the country with the amount; but he stated he had taken passage, of his own free will, on board a vessel bound for the port of Lisbon, and that he had been thrown overboard by the steward for the sake of what wealth he carried about with him.

For the rest, all he said was no more than the truth; and when the old gentleman and his wife heard the story of his incredible sufferings, they were filled with wonder and compassion.

He informed them that he wished to reach London, and the old gentleman said:

"I know not and care not who you are, but I feel sorry for your sufferings. As soon as you are well enough to

take the journey, you shall leave this place, and I will provide you with a few necessaries for the journey."

Wild junior was profuse in his acknowledgments and thanks; in fact, the manner in which he expressed his gratitude was rather irksome to the good people than otherwise.

But in all that he said George was perfectly sincere.

On this occasion he showed that he had a heart, and that the behaviour of these strangers to him had touched it.

For a few days George remained here in peacefulness and silence.

By slow and insensible degrees his evil nature began to gain the ascendancy over him.

To a great extent, he forgot the immense benefits that had been showered upon him by the good people of the house; at any rate, the grateful feeling which had held possession of his heart waned exceedingly.

He began to look about him—at the various plain but costly articles contained within the house, and also to speculate upon what was the probable amount of wealth possessed by his benefactor.

The more he pursued these thoughts and speculations, the more did the evil in his nature gain the supremacy.

"In this world," he said to himself, a day or two before the time that had been fixed for his departure—"in this world there is nothing but a perpetual struggle going on between the strong and the weak—the wary and the unwary. Of course, those who are strongest and possess the most cunning are the best off, while the weak and the scrupulous go to the wall. I have been entrapped and plundered of all I had without remorse. This old man, who has been thrown in my way by chance, possesses plenty, and would not miss a little. To be sure, he has said he would provide me with some necessities for my journey, which is all that could be expected from a man in the way of charity; but I want something more. I have been robbed of that which I had, and I will rob to make up the deficiency!"

That, in the angry state of his mind, and with so little consideration for the things of others as he always had, Wild junior should come to some determination like the present is not surprising.

But that he should contemplate plundering the man who had rendered him such essential service in the hour of need, and who had done everything in his power to ameliorate his condition, was truly heartless and horrible.

Still, it is no more than might have been expected from the son of Jonathan Wild.

He was tolerably strong,—it might be said that he had recovered from the effects of his late adventures; and the more he pondered upon the idea of making such an ungrateful return for the benefits which had been so unworthily showered upon him, the more determined he became to carry it out.

"It is just what I need to put me right," he said to himself, "and why should I scruple to take it? Such a man must have enough and to spare."

After this, Wild junior's resolve became settled.

He was allowed to roam at will over every portion of the house, and consequently he had every opportunity of planning his villainous design.

He had every chance in his favour.

There were only a few domestics in the house, so that he did not apprehend any difficulty from them.

On the very next night he made up his mind to carry out his purpose.

He had ascertained that the owner of the house kept his plate and jewels, and what ready money he had, in a large and strong iron chest.

This chest he invariably kept under his bed, and slept with the keys beneath his pillow.

To know this was a great deal, but still there were so many difficulties in the way of carrying out his nefarious plan that it would not have been surprising if he had hesitated.

But he did not.

On the night he had selected for his black design, he retired to his own room, and sat patiently near the window.

He waited until every sound had died away, and until he felt almost certain in his mind that every inhabitant of the house was sound asleep.

He then rose silently to his feet, and crept with the greatest caution towards the bed-room door.

He opened it without making a sound, and projected his head into the corridor beyond.

He listened intently, but all was still.

Reassured by this, he made his way with slow and cautious steps towards the door of the room in which the old gentleman slept.

It must be understood that Wild junior had no tools with him requisite for such an expedition as the present.

Therefore, if the bed-room door had been locked, it would have been a formidable, if not an insuperable, obstacle to the success of his purpose.

But in the security he felt in his own bed, and in the confidence he had in human nature generally, the owner of the house never for one moment thought of fastening his door in any way.

When Wild junior had reached it, he paused for a few seconds on the threshold.

But reassured by the continued silence, he placed his hands upon the latch, and gently raised it.

He allowed the door to open only a very little way, and then he stopped to listen again.

Of course if an alarm was given there would be an end to his plan entirely.

Failure would be fatal.

Then, as he listened, he was presently able to distinguish the light, regular breathing of persons in slumber.

"All is well!" he said, mentally—"all is well!"

The silence and darkness of the spot produced some slight effect even upon the callous heart of George Wild.

But the influence this excited was so slight as to be scarcely perceptible to himself.

Like a ghost he glided into the chamber.

Upon a little bracket just above the dressing-table a small lamp was burning.

It just served to make the different objects in the room distinguishable, and that was all.

George Wild was thankful for it, for he was enabled to guard against coming in contact with any article of furniture.

There was the bed, beneath which was the wealth he had determined to become the possessor of.

For an instant he hesitated whether he should attempt to draw the box out first or to take the keys from underneath the pillow.

The former was the course he adopted.

Sinking down upon his hands and knees, he crept noiselessly over the thick carpet with which the apartment was covered.

He crept partly under the bed, and almost immediately his head came in contact with the iron box.

He took hold of it and tried to pull it out, but the weight was too great.

Although he put forth his utmost strength, the box did not move in the least degree.

The perspiration started out in bead-like drops upon his skin, for he began to fear that, after all, he should fail in his design.

He placed his hand upon the top of the box, and then raising it, he found that there was some little distance between the lid and the bottom of the bed.

This inspired him with fresh hope, for he believed he should be able to open the box and abstract the contents without the necessity of removing it from its position.

He passed his hand rapidly round the side of it and soon found the keyhole.

He was now content, so far as that was concerned.

The next thing he had to do—and this was by far the most difficult of all—was to obtain possession of the keys that lay underneath the pillow.

He would have to abstract them with so much secrecy as not to awaken the sleeper.

To this task he now immediately addressed himself.

He crept round to the side of the bed, and then raised himself slowly to his full height.

His benefactor was slumbering peacefully and gently.

But the sight of this sweet repose made Wild junior's heart swell with anger.

He stretched forth his hand, and as he did so he muttered:

"He had better not awake; if he does, let him look to it himself!"

His eyes glittered with an ominous brightness.

Gently and slowly he insinuated his hand beneath the pillow.

The old gentleman moved once uneasily in his sleep, and one inarticulate word came from his lips, but what it was George Wild knew not.

He paused a moment, and then renewed his attempt.

Presently, to his joy, the tips of his fingers touched the keys.

He took hold of them, and then—most difficult operation of all—began to draw his hand slowly backwards.

But the slumber of the old gentleman was as profound as ever, and George Wild's heart beat high with hope.

Another second, and he had them securely in his grasp.

But the old gentleman awoke suddenly with a start.

He opened his eyes widely, and caught sight of Wild junior standing by his bedside.

Guessing in an instant the purport of his visit, he uttered a loud cry.

Or rather he half uttered it, for, with the suddenness of thought, George clenched his fist, and struck him a violent blow on the mouth.

But the old gentleman, in spite of his years, possessed good courage and strength, and resolved to do battle with his midnight visitor.

He rose up in bed, and, with the blood streaming from his lips, gasped out another cry for help.

Wild junior was now furious.

"Silence!" he cried, in a low, hoarse voice—"silence! I don't want to take your life, but you will force me to it if you are not still!"

Then, with a low, half-stifled shriek of terror, the old lady awoke.

"Thieves—thieves!" she cried. "Help—mercy—help!"

George Wild was now more furious than ever.

Let us do him the credit to say that, when he first projected this expedition, the worst injury he had intended to inflict upon his benefactors was robbery.

Now, however, through this unexpected and unfortunate discovery, he was forced to adopt one of two alternatives.

He must either forego his villainous attempt, or else he must add murder to his original crime.

He was conscious of this without requiring to pause for reflection.

Nor did he hesitate—his mind was made up so quickly that it did not seem as though he had paused to reflect at all.

CHAPTER DLII.

AFTER MANY PERILS AND VICISSITUDES, WILD JUNIOR ARRIVES IN LONDON

HE gave one hasty glance around in search of some weapon that would answer his diabolical purpose.

Within reach of his hand was either an iron bar or a poker,—he did not stop to look which.

He seized it with the speed of thought.

Then, with this fearful weapon, some horrible crashing blows were dealt, and then, in a second afterwards, George Wild was the only living person in the room.

His benefactor and benefactress lay upon the bed a ghastly and hideous sight.

Dropping the murderous instrument, George Wild, with nervous haste, took hold of the keys, and went to the iron box.

So great was his agitation, that it was some time before he found out which was the right key, and turned it in the lock.

He listened in an agony of apprehension, for each moment he expected to hear some sounds from the other inhabitants of the house, who, he thought, could scarcely fail to be aroused by the tumult.

But all was still.

And as time passed by without his meeting with any interruption, his courage revived.

Now that there was no longer any fear of arousing those who occupied the bed, he roughly pushed the bedstead on one side, so that the box was disclosed.

Without doing this, he found it was impossible to get at the contents.

The box was nearly full of miscellaneous articles, all doubtless of a valuable description, but valuable in different ways.

There were papers, and deeds, and parchments of various sizes and kinds, but to these Wild junior paid no sort

of attention, but impatiently tossed them on to the floor.

Some heavy, massive articles of plate which he knew he could not carry away with him, as it would be too great an encumbrance to his flight, he likewise placed upon the floor, but he regretted the necessity of leaving them behind.

A number of small silver articles that he could carry about with him in his pockets he took charge of, and also a considerable sum in gold, silver, and notes.

It was wonderful to see the rapidity with which he did all this.

In less time than anyone could have believed possible, he had ransacked the box, and was making preparations for his flight.

But suddenly he paused, and the blood retreated to his heart with a sickening rush.

A faint rustling sound came upon his ears.

Then followed a faint tapping sound against the door of the chamber.

Then George remembered that he had not fastened it.

He gave one bound, and then his hand was on the lock.

He turned the key instantly.

But the sudden force with which he came against the door, and the sharp click of the bolt of the lock, had an alarming effect upon the person outside.

A shrill scream and loud cries for help broke the silence of the mansion.

Then hasty trampling of feet followed, and all those noises which would indicate that the whole of the inmates were alarmed and astir.

Wild junior bitterly cursed his ill-luck.

Retreat in the direction of the door was impossible.

Nothing but the window remained to him.

This was a considerable distance from the ground, and in dropping from it he might sustain a serious injury.

Then he knew that there were several dogs about, who in all probability would commence an attack upon him.

But there was no help for it—he must either try the desperate hazard of escaping in that manner or give himself up without resistance.

It was not likely that he would do this.

He dashed open the window, and scrambling through, hung for an instant at the full length of his arms, and dropped.

He reached the ground with a sudden and smart shock, which for awhile deprived him of breath.

Then he struggled to his feet, and looking back, saw that lights were flitting to and fro in the house, and there were loud cries, evidently proving that the murders had been discovered.

In a moment or two, doubtless, the two men-servants would be in pursuit of him.

This sudden discovery was a thing he had not anticipated, nor had he looked forward to having to run for his life.

Yet that was what he had to do, and he started off across the grounds at all the speed he could make.

But he was not in good physical condition for such exertion, and, moreover, the plunder he had stowed about his person weighed him down.

The grounds, too, were of great extent, and it was some time before he reached the high, strong, wooden fence with which they were surrounded.

At last he came to it, but it is doubtful whether he would have succeeded in climbing over, but for the aid which was afforded him by a tree that grew conveniently near.

He climbed up the trunk of this, and crept along one branch that stretched out in a horizontal direction.

He was thus enabled to lower himself into the road.

He felt his feet touch the earth, but he did not stop to recover himself, nor to look around him, nor to listen whether his pursuers were very close behind him or not.

On he flew at a speed that was truly remarkable, and which threatened to set pursuit at defiance.

At last, panting and exhausted from his violent exertion, he found himself unable to run any further, and so came to a dead stop.

Thoroughly worn out, he sank down by the wayside.

Two or three moments thus elapsed, and then the

clattering of a horse's feet along the road he had just come struck upon his sense of hearing.

His first impulse was to spring to his feet and run on again.

But even as he made the effort to rise, he felt his limbs tremble under him.

"No—no!" he cried. "I can run no further! I must stop here where I am, and run the risk of being seen!"

He crouched down still lower in the empty ditch, in the hope of being able to escape the observation of the person who was coming.

That he should suppose this was some one in pursuit of him is nothing to be wondered at; but he was deceived.

The person approaching at such a furious gallop was, indeed, one of the servants from the house.

But he was not in pursuit of the murderer.

He was on what he considered a far more important errand, and this was to pay a visit to the nearest surgeon, and apprise him of the dreadful events which had occurred.

Therefore, Wild junior had the satisfaction of seeing this man pass him in his hiding-place at full gallop.

In a little while the sound of his horse's hoofs grew fainter and fainter, and then altogether ceased.

The villain then began to congratulate himself upon the ease with which, after all, he had accomplished his purpose.

But this feeling did not long continue, for, from the direction of the house, he could hear shouts and cries; and directly afterwards he beheld in the distance a number of small, moving, twinkling lights.

Then an angry curse came from his lips, and again he endeavoured to rise.

This time he succeeded, for, although he had sat there for such a little time, he had greatly recovered his strength.

The cunning of his disposition prompted him to change the course he had been pursuing, and accordingly he turned off at right-angles.

The sky was covered with dense black clouds, and not a single star could be perceived, so that there was nothing which could serve him as a guide as to the direction he ought to take.

He still wished and intended to make his way to London with the least possible delay.

He had now money enough in his pocket to answer his immediate purpose.

There was no fear of his being in want.

Presently, as he ran onwards, he came to the high-road.

He hesitated whether he should make his way along it or cross over.

Then he heard a rumbling sound in the distance.

"The stage-coach," he murmured, after listening for a moment; "doubtless on its way to London."

He hailed this as a fortunate event, but directly afterwards he muttered:

"No, no—it will not do! Second thoughts, they say, are best, and certainly they are in this case. I shall have to make my way to London with the greatest care and caution. If I get into this coach, I shall be noticed by the guard. Inquiries will of course be made after me, and then the officers will be on my track at once. No, no! I must not think of that!"

Not being able to hear anything of his pursuers in the rear, he concealed himself behind the hedge, and waited until the coach should come by.

He had not very long to wait.

With a rush and rattle, the cumbersome machine rolled by.

There was a flash of light, a whirl of wheels, and then the stage-coach was away down the road.

Wild junior looked after it with longing eyes.

He thought how glorious it would be to travel at such a rate as that from the scene of his late exploits.

He was now already worn out with fatigue, and the distance he had to go was very great.

But he had no other resource than to summon all his energies to get out of that part of the country before day-break.

A terrible crime such as he had committed would not be allowed to pass away unnoticed.



[JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN IN PURSUIT OF JONATHAN WILD.]

The strongest efforts would be made to overtake and capture the criminal.

When he entered London, he doubted not all would be well.

Once there, he knew he should be able to obtain such a disguise as would render detection an impossibility.

Weary and tired, he trudged on, taking the greatest pains to elude observation, and over and over again cursing his ill-luck.

He had money in his pocket, but the curse of ill-got wealth appeared to cling to it.

He might have bought or hired a horse several times during his long walk, but he was afraid to do so, because in the event of a pursuit that incident would form a clue, and enable his foes to get upon his track.

There was no help, then, but to perform the journey on foot.

At last morning came, and he looked about him in

No. 118.—BLUESKIN.

the hope of being able to espy some place of concealment.

A large expanse of country, dotted here and there with little habitations, was spread out before him.

Many of the occupants of those dwellings would willingly allow him to enter and rest himself, but Wild junior did not dare ask one of them.

Not only was he tired down and unable to go any further, but there was another and still more cogent reason why he should conceal himself.

This was in consequence of the daylight.

Various people would, of course, be abroad, pursuing their usual daily avocations, and by some of these he would certainly be seen.

The only place he could see that seemed at all likely to answer his purpose was a hay-stack.

In this he fancied he should be able to conceal himself, and if he succeeded, no one would find him there.

He looked about him, but could see no one.

Cautiously he approached the stack.

When close to it, he found that on one side it had been cut, and a small quantity of loose hay was lying on the ground hard by.

His mind was soon made up.

Going to the side of the stack opposite to that which had been cut, he began with great industry to pull out the hay, so as to leave a place where he could conceal himself.

At last, however, this task was accomplished.

The quantity of hay he had displaced was considerable.

Carefully he gathered every morsel of it up, and placed it on top of the heap of which we have already spoken.

The next thing was to creep into the haystack, and this appeared to be the most difficult part of the undertaking.

After a brief deliberation, he resolved to push himself in feet foremost.

He succeeded in this attempt with more ease than might have been expected.

At length he fairly got his head inside the stack.

With his hands, then, he pulled down the hay in front of him, so as to conceal the opening.

He did this with great skill; and without a very close examination indeed, or without it was suspected that he had hidden there, he stood a good chance of escaping discovery.

Still, in spite of its apparent security, Wild junior found it to be a very disagreeable place to remain in, for the hay above gradually settled down upon him, and the weight of the superincumbent mass was something terrific.

He gasped painfully for breath, and moved about uneasily.

CHAPTER DLIII.

WILD JUNIOR DISCOVERS THAT HIS HIDING-PLACE IS A VERY DANGEROUS ONE.

AFTER a time, Wild junior became accustomed to the pressure, and then, thoroughly exhausted by all that he had gone through, he sank off into a profound sleep, which lasted for many hours, despite the uncomfortable and peculiar nature of the place he was in.

It is quite certain that the callous-hearted wretch never felt any remorse or compunction for the barbarous crime he had committed.

On the contrary, he experienced a feeling of very great satisfaction.

In his pockets he had money and valuables to a considerable amount.

In fact, he was quite prepared to re-enter London.

And so, although his soul was so deeply stained with blood, the villain slept.

Slept the calm repose of innocence and youth.

Slept as though no sin could be laid to his charge.

He awakened, however, with a start of alarm.

Voices reached his ears.

Persons engaged in conversation were evidently somewhere close at hand.

For a moment, Wild junior's intellects were somewhat confused.

He could not make out where he was.

But recollection soon returned, and then he prepared himself to listen with all the intenceness he could command.

"Why, do you mean to say you have not heard of it?" exclaimed a voice, in tones of great surprise.

"No," was the reply; "I have heard no more than you have just told me!"

"Lor, now! Well, to be sure!"

"Tell us—tell us?"

"All about it?"

"Yes."

"It is a most awful case. Such a murder was never heard of before!"

In spite of his callousness, a cold perspiration burst out all over Wild junior's body when he heard the word "Murder" pronounced.

With the readiness of a guilty conscience, which is ever its own accuser, he jumped to the conclusion that the murder alluded to was no other than the one committed by himself.

This was highly improbable, as a moment's calm reflection might have told him.

In those days there were no means by which intelligence could be rapidly transmitted, as there is now, and therefore it was extremely unlikely that those he heard conversing knew anything about the double murder committed at the house by the sea.

But, as the greatest poet has truly said

Suspicion ever haunts the guilty mind—

perfectly breathless, Wild junior waited to hear what the other had to say.

"A most awful murder," were the next words that reached his ears. "Such a one as has not been heard of for years back. It makes my very blood run cold when I even think of it!"

"Does it, though?"

"It was horrible! And there was robbery as well!"

"Robbery?"

"Yes; the murderer carried off along with him a great deal of valuable property!"

"And he has not been caught?"

"No; though active search is being made. They have got some kind of a clue to his whereabouts, I fancy."

"Well, I only hope he will be hung, as all such wretches ought to be! They are not fit to live!"

"Nor to die either!"

"No—truly! However, that is no business of ours."

"No; but I know what is."

"To cut the hay for the cattle?"

"Yes! We have been here gossiping longer than we ought to have been. We must make haste, or the gaffer will want to know what we have been about!"

"But you have not told me the particulars of the murder."

"No; and I must not stop to do so now."

"Tell me as we go back to the house."

"Very well, I will. Now, then, get the knives—we must cut the stack!"

Here was horrible news for George Wild.

The men were about to cut the stack.

Wild junior had seen the operation performed many a time.

The long, keen, heavy knife used for the purpose would make its way through everything.

Whereabouts the men were going to cut the hay, of course, he could not tell, but it appeared to him most probable that it was somewhere close at hand, because he could hear their words with so much distinctness.

Here was a horrible position.

If it by chance happened that any part of his body should be underneath where the knife would come down he would be either killed outright, or deprived of some of his limbs.

His body would afford no more resistance to the passage of the knife than would the hay itself.

Wild junior trembled with fear.

If he remained where he was he would be running what was truly an awful risk.

In fact, it was insanity—suicide, to think of retaining his present position.

But, then, if he crawled out, he could not fail to be seen by the two men.

He might be able to overpower them, or he might not, for they would assuredly have the advantage over him in more ways than one.

At the best, he would be seen, and if he escaped these men he would have to run.

They, of course, would know what direction he took, and so would set his pursuers on his track.

"They know all about the murder," he thought, "and no doubt they will recognise me at once!"

Wild junior was in a serious dilemma.

To remain where he was, however, was simply impossible.

No matter what the danger and risk of leaving his place of concealment might be, it must be done.

He drew a long breath, and then muttered some horrible curses between his teeth.

Still he lingered.

Lingered until it was not safe to do so any longer.

A horrible crushing noise, which made the blood in its veins turn as cold as ice, came upon his ears.

It was the knife.

Cutting its way through the mass of hay above him.

He must creep out.

In another moment it would be too late.

Perhaps it was too late already.

Lower and lower—closer and closer came the keen and heavy blade.

Wild made a desperate effort to creep out.

But he could not move.

The hay had settled closely all around him, and though he put forth his utmost strength he was not able to move a limb.

He made a mighty effort.

But to no better purpose than before.

He was immovable.

And still the knife continued to come down.

There was no time for deliberation.

He was sure by the feel of the hay that the knife was just above him.

Perhaps it was only separated from his body by a few inches.

Horrible fate!

Down—down it came.

But he might just as well have tried to crawl out from under a mountain.

He had but one resource.

Even that might fail.

It was to call out for assistance.

He must disclose the secret of his presence there to the three men.

Either that or perish

And in his case, discovery was almost as bad as death itself.

As rapidly as he could, he moved the hay from before his mouth.

Then in a wild, shrieking, unnatural tone, he cried:

"Stop—stop! Do you wish to murder me? Stop—stop, I say!"

His voice sounded strangely—he did not even recognise it himself.

This was partly in consequence of the intense terror under which he was labouring, and also in consequence of his being so closely surrounded by the hay.

It allowed his voice to escape, but it totally changed its tones.

The progress of the knife suddenly ceased.

Wild junior heard a loud shout and cries of alarm.

Then there was a rushing of footsteps.

Afterwards all was still.

For a moment the danger was over, and Wild junior was so completely prostrated and overcome that for several moments he could not summon up strength to attempt to make a movement.

Then he murmured:

"They are terrified—they are frightened! I have scared them away! Now, if I can only creep out and hide myself somewhere else, all will be well!"

The two men who had been engaged in cutting the hay were in truth terribly frightened.

They had been conversing with each other about a murder that had been lately perpetrated in the vicinity until their boorish minds got into a very morbid condition.

Then all at once they heard a hideous, muffled sound, such as had never before come to their ears.

At first they stood stock still, suspending their labour as if by magic.

Then, as the sound continued and increased in loudness, they, believing that some ghost or other hideous apparition was at hand, uttered loud cries of terror and fled.

Where, they scarcely knew.

The silence that prevailed around had a reassuring effect upon Wild junior.

He was of a buoyant disposition, and never allowed himself to be long cast down.

"I must creep out," he said—"I must creep out; but how?"

The hay pressed upon him, and it seemed as though there were tons and tons above him; he had still some use left in his arms, and by clutching hold of the outside of the stack he tried to drag himself out.

After incredible toil, he at length succeeded in effecting his purpose, but he was so exhausted that he lay down on the ground close to the stack incapable of motion.

In a little while, however, he recovered himself sufficiently to look around him.

Then he observed with surprise that night had almost come.

The sun had set, and the trees and meadows around were fast becoming involved in gloom.

He had, then, despite the uncomfortable nature of his situation, slept for very many hours in the stack.

Now that all things had turned out so well, he felt glad that he had awoke.

Time was precious to him, and he must now push on with all speed towards London.

The sooner he reached the metropolis the better.

The prospect of shortly being in comparative safety produced a wonderful effect upon George Wild.

The exhaustion and fatigue to which he had been compelled to succumb disappeared as if by magic.

He sprang to his feet.

As he did so, his eyes happened to fall upon the rude apparatus made use of by the men to cut the hay.

An uncontrollable curiosity made Wild junior approach in order to see whether his danger was in reality as great as he had imagined it.

The knife was buried deeply in the haystack, but yet he could see the end of it, and form a tolerably accurate idea of its position.

He shuddered.

His fears had not deceived him.

The knife was close down over the spot where he had concealed himself.

If he had hesitated any longer about uttering that cry, or if the men had caused the knife to descend only a little lower, he would have been seriously injured.

A sigh of relief unconsciously escaped his lips, and then he turned away.

As he did so, he fancied the sound of distant voices came upon his ears, and, with a sudden start, he turned round and looked in the direction from which the cries came.

He then perceived in the distance a number of moving lights.

They looked strange at first; but as he continued to gaze, he was able to make them out.

A rather large body of men, carrying lanterns either in their hands or else fixed upon the top of long poles, were coming at a rapid rate across the meadows.

It was pretty evident that their destination was the haystack.

"I must be off," muttered George, as he beheld them—"off to London! It will be folly for me to linger here!"

CHAPTER DLIV.

GEORGE WILD ARRIVES IN LONDON, AND PAYS IN ADVANCE FOR HIS LODGINGS.

THE body of men that George Wild saw came from the farm-house to which the two men belonged.

Upon reaching it, they had given an alarming account of the horrible sound they had heard proceeding from the interior of the haystack, and the farmer and all the men employed about the place were quickly on the alert.

With greater courage than might have been expected from such people under the circumstances, they had determined to proceed to the haystack with all possible speed, in order to solve the mystery.

Accordingly, they provided themselves with lanterns, and armed themselves with offensive weapons of various kinds, such as pickaxes, spades, flails, and other such articles; but, of course, they found nothing, and the whole affair remained an inscrutable mystery.

As for Wild junior, he crouched down, and, in a curious, stooping posture, made his way at a rapid rate across the fields.

In a few minutes he gained the high-road, and then he slackened his pace.

Not a single individual or vehicle of any kind was in sight, so he resolved to walk at a rapid pace along the highway.

He would be able to make better speed upon the level road than he would in attempting to push his way in a straight line across the country.

He walked on at a very rapid speed; but presently he

began to feel greatly fatigued, and at length was compelled to sit down upon a stile and rest himself.

He was now at a considerable distance from the haystack, and did not fear any interruption from the persons he had seen advancing towards it.

How long he sat there he scarcely knew. It must have been for a considerable time.

Still, he felt dreadfully tired, and quite incapable of continuing his walk.

"How shall I reach London?" he asked himself. "Curse this weakness! I could never have believed that what has taken place could have had such an effect upon me. My strength seems quite gone."

He remained for a long time in deep thought, wondering by what means he could reach London secretly, and without fatiguing himself.

This was a problem he was unable to solve.

He must either walk or ride.

He could not do the latter without the knowledge of some one who would see him, and then there would be a clue to the course he had taken.

While thus ruminating, he heard the sound of heavy wheels in the distance.

He listened, and presently looking down the road he perceived in the distance a large, covered waggon drawn by three horses.

He fixed his eyes upon this cumbersome vehicle that was journeying along at the wonderful speed of about two miles an hour.

Then the waggon came up.

As he sat on the stile, Wild junior noticed what strong, beautiful horses were harnessed to it.

High up on a seat was the waggoner.

He held the reins listlessly and mechanically in his hands, and it was pretty evident that the horses received no sort of guidance from him.

Indeed, by the manner in which the man's head bent forward upon his breast, and the manner in which his body swayed to and fro, it was tolerably certain that he was asleep.

George watched the waggon go by, and gazed after it.

He then saw that it was loaded with sacks containing some kind of grain.

He fancied flour from the whiteness of the sacks and the white dust that was powdered all over the hind part of the vehicle.

"If I was to walk quickly," thought Wild, "I could easily overtake that waggon and climb in at the back, and lie down on some of the sacks without the driver being one bit the wiser. I should be resting myself and getting towards London at the same time."

With these words, Wild junior got up off the stile, and walked along the road after the waggon.

It was then that he became more than ever sensible of his extreme weakness.

He had not to go far, and yet, by the time he reached the tail of the waggon, he was very tired.

To pull himself up by the aid of a chain was not a very difficult task, and, having accomplished his purpose so far, he crawled over the tops of the sacks until he got to the front part of the waggon.

Here he was in total darkness.

Evidently, the driver was quite unaware of what had taken place.

In the same half-sleepy style he continued to drive his horses along the road.

George stretched himself at full length upon the sacks, and made himself as comfortable as he could.

He was not in want of sleep, but he desired rest; it was necessary that he should recover as much as possible his exhausted energies.

The fact was, a great many hours had elapsed since he had last taken food, and this was the cause principally of his exhaustion.

He had not felt the pangs of hunger once—he had been too excited; but now, as he lay down upon the sacks in comparative safety, he felt as if famished.

It was scarcely likely, however, that in the waggon he should be able to find anything by which he could appease his hunger.

As time passed by, however, this increased to such an intolerable extent, that he could bear it no longer.

As he expected, the sacks contained wheat.

He opened one of them, and then, with an eagerness

remarkable to witness, he began to devour handful after handful of the dry flour.

It was but a poor repast for anyone, yet there was nourishment and sustenance in it.

After a little while, he felt wonderfully better than he had done hitherto.

Without the recurrence of any accident whatever, the long winter's night gradually wore away.

The waggoner stopped several times at various public-houses on the route; but George Wild, squeezing himself down close among the sacks, escaped observation.

All at once the idea occurred to him that, as he was now much stronger and better, he might crawl out of the waggon just before it stopped at one of those inns, and enter it.

He would then be able to satisfy his thirst, which was truly terrific, and by walking sharply, or even running, if it was necessary, he should easily be able to overtake the waggon again.

With this view, he crept to the end and looked out.

He was a long time before he saw the least sign of any habitation, but at last he caught sight of a wayside inn.

He descended at once.

He did not know whether the waggoner would stop at this inn or not.

He had to run the risk of that.

When he got down into the road he found that his clothes were very much covered with flour, and it took him several minutes to free himself from the white dust.

He was only able to succeed to a partial extent.

Then he walked on, keeping the waggon just in front of him.

To his satisfaction, the vehicle came to a standstill in front of the inn, and the waggoner, without getting down from his seat, drank a jug of old ale which was brought to him, while his horses were refreshed with a little hay and water.

In the meanwhile, George entered the inn.

It was a very late hour, and there was scarcely anyone in to be seen.

A middle-aged woman was standing at the bar, and she regarded Wild junior rather curiously as he came in.

He was unable to get anything but ale; so he was obliged to content himself with a jug of sour stuff. He would greatly have preferred brandy, or some other fiery beverage, but it was not to be had.

"I am on the tramp," he said to the landlady, "and have been for a goodish bit."

"But you're all over flour," said the landlady.

"I am," replied George. "A man with a waggon of flour was kind enough to give me a lift a little while ago. Have you got any bread and cheese?"

"Yes."

These articles were brought, and George Wild bought rather a large quantity of both, which he tied up in a handkerchief.

He then paid his reckoning and took his leave.

Upon leaving the inn, he found that the waggon had already started, and was a long way off down the road.

He walked on at a rapid pace, and presently came up with it.

In the same way as before, he scrambled inside, and laid himself down on the sacks.

Things seemed to look much more favourable than they had done for some time past, and Wild junior was quite in good spirits.

It so happened that the waggon he had crawled into was on its way to London, and after a tedious journey, but as rapid a one as, under the circumstances, he could hope to make, George Wild at length found himself in the vicinity of the metropolis.

He had managed to escape observation so far, and just when London appeared in the distance, he resolved to get down and walk the remainder of the distance.

He did so.

It was just growing dusk, and before he reached the Thames it was quite dark.

Now that he was in London, George Wild felt greatly relieved.

He did not imagine himself to be in the least danger, and he boldly entered a small house of public accommodation near the river side.

As a matter of course, Wild junior was profoundly ignorant of all that had taken place in London since his

departure, and he was not a little curious to know what had happened.

Still, he did not like to ask any questions, for fear of attracting too much notice to himself.

He kept his ears open, however, and listened attentively to the conversation of the persons present.

It turned upon the escape of Jonathan Wild from Newgate, and, very much to George's astonishment, he found that his father and the Governor of Newgate were still at liberty, having set all efforts for capture completely at defiance.

This was news indeed for George.

He fully expected—and, indeed, if the truth must be told, quite hoped—that his father had been comfortably put out of the way at Tyburn, and that he should have nothing to dread on that score.

Now, however, that he was at large, it would be necessary for him to behave with the utmost caution, as George did not doubt that his father had discovered all about the abstraction of the money from the bank.

He could tell to a trifle what his rage would be.

He was also aware that it would be unwise and dangerous in the extreme for him to cross his path.

One thing he now had to attend to more particularly than anything else, and this was to keep out of the way of his parent.

George sallied forth into the night air.

"I must think," he muttered to himself, as he strode rapidly along—"I must think! My position is still difficult! Let me think what I had better do!"

This occupied him for a long time.

Just at present, however, we cannot make the reader aware of the precise nature of his meditations—it must suffice to say that at last George became much more composed than he had been.

His face assumed quite a different expression, and he rubbed his hands together as though he had hit upon some very good scheme indeed.

"Yes, yes," he said—"that is it! I must do it! It's the only chance I have!"

He looked around him, and found himself in one of the poor districts of London.

He had wandered on without paying any particular attention as to where he was going.

"I can do nothing to-night," he said. "I must have time to mature my plans. I will get a night's lodging somewhere. This seems to be a capital place. I shall not be found here, or suspected. Yes, as chance has brought me to this quarter, I will stay here for a time."

He looked up and down the street, and then, one by one, at the various windows.

In those days, the people were not so genteel and refined as they are now.

At the present day, everybody who has a little, miserable, ill-furnished room to let calls it an "apartment;" but in those days they were in the habit of calling a spade a spade; and so, at length, in one of the windows George found the terse announcement—"Good lodgings to let"

"That will do," he said to himself. "I will apply here."

He rang the bell as he spoke.

The door was opened by one of those wretched little female objects who are generally to be found in a lodging-house, and who are ridiculously called "servants."

"I want to look at the lodgings," said George, in an abrupt and business-like tone.

"Missus," cried the girl, without leaving the front door, "you're wanted!"

A sharp-featured, angular-looking specimen of feminine humanity now made her appearance.

"Are you in want of lodgings, sir?" she said, in an oily tone of voice.

"Yes," said George.

"Please to walk in, sir, and you can see them."

George obeyed, and a candle having been procured, the lodging-house keeper led him upstairs on to the second floor.

"There's two rooms to let," said the landlady. "One's a bed-room and the other's a sitting-room. You can have one or the two, whichever you think proper."

George reflected a moment, and then he said:

"I will take the two."

"Very well, sir, of course. The rent will be six shil-

lings a week, paid in advance, and two references required."

"I have only just come up from a distant part of the country," said George, "and don't know anyone in London; therefore I can't furnish you with the references you require."

"Oh, indeed!" said the landlady, looking him very hard in the face. "Well, my rule is to have references, and I can't make any exception to it."

"I have some references in my pocket," said George, "which may perhaps suit you. I'll take the rooms for a month, and here are a couple of guineas in payment."

Quite a sudden change came over the landlady.

"Oh, my dear sir, you are too good—much too good! I can tell now that you are a gentleman from the country; but in London it is necessary that we should be so very particular!"

"Of course—of course!" said George. "I have heard that it is a dreadful place!"

"It is. But, for my part, I would sooner let lodgings to people from the country than I would to Londoners—that is to say, if I'm satisfied they are not deceiving me."

"Just so!" said Wild junior. "I suppose I can take possession of the lodgings at once?"

"You can, sir, with all the pleasure in the world! What can I have the pleasure of getting for you? Or would you prefer to go out and buy the things yourself?"

"No, that be d—d!" said George. "Bring me something to eat and drink, but don't bother me about it!"

"Very good, sir," said the landlady, with quite a pleasant smile, for, like all lodging-house keepers, as a matter of course, she liked to provide for her lodgers.

"A nice supper is what I want," said George; "I am not particular what it is; and bring a pint of brandy."

George sat down in a chair.

"All right, sir," said the landlady, "you shall be attended to at once. I will send the servant up to light you a fire, for the room seems chilly."

"It is d—d cold!" said George, "that's what it is!" and he rubbed his hands together as he spoke.

The landlady was not at all displeased with his swearing—in fact, how could she be displeased with a lodger who had taken the rooms for a month at six shillings a week, and paid her two guineas in advance?

CHAPTER DLV.

RETURNS AT LENGTH TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD.

ONCE more we return to chronicle the proceedings of these two personages in our story, in whom it is presumed the reader feels a greater amount of interest than in any others.

We allude, of course, to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

The tide of events has for so long carried us away from them, that we may be excused if we here refresh the mind of the reader as to the circumstances under which we last saw them.

Strange—and, as it seems, incredible—to say, they were, when we saw them last, seated in the Lord Chancellor's own private carriage, along with the Lord Chancellor himself.

The remarkable circumstances which brought them into this position cannot be forgotten.

The carriage was rolling rapidly on its way to that lodging-house in Westminster where Edgworth Bess was staying.

Blueskin, it must be borne in mind, had already declared his identity to the Chancellor, who, having all occurrences, and particularly those of the past, fresh in his remembrance, had promised to use what influence he had to obtain a pardon.

But Jack Sheppard he did not know.

It would have been dangerous in the highest degree to have uttered even the faintest whisper to the effect that this daring depredator had been resuscitated.

But there was a pleased and delighted feeling about the hearts of our two friends.

They saw clearly enough that the end they had been so long toiling for was at last within view.

Jonathan Wild—disgraced, doomed to death—was flying over the country a miserable fugitive.

His capture would certainly in a short time take place.

Whether it did or not, however, there was the great consolation to think that Edgworth Bess had no longer anything to fear from his machinations.

The thief-taker possessed the will doubtless to do an injury to the poor girl, but he had not the power.

In a few minutes the lodging-house would be reached, for the carriage rolled along with great swiftness, and the distance was but short.

Blueskin and Jack would have the satisfaction of handing the persecuted heiress into the protection of the Lord Chancellor.

When once that functionary took her by the hand, she would be, to all intents and purposes, quite safe.

They would no longer have occasion to trouble themselves about her welfare, but they would be able to turn the whole of their attention to an important subject.

That was no other than to hunt down Jonathan Wild.

They had both decided upon it, and felt sure that nothing in the world would induce them to alter their determination.

Jonathan Wild had hunted them with the ferocity of a wild beast—he had mocked at and derided their sufferings, and used all the power he possessed to compass their destruction.

He had made them both miserable fugitives, and, to a great extent, caused them to be amenable to the laws, simply because they refused to give him their aidance in his nefarious schemes—simply because they would not join him in working the ruin of a poor, helpless girl, who from her youth had known nothing but misery, when she ought to have known affluence, and who could not so much as raise a finger in her own defence.

That was the great cause of the animosity which existed on Jonathan Wild's part towards our friends.

Now, however, as they told themselves over and over again, all that was at an end.

Jonathan Wild was no longer the bold, unscrupulous thief-taker, possessed of power of which scarcely anyone knew the limits, but he was a miserable fugitive, hiding and skulking in corners, and occupied incessantly in avoiding the many officers of justice who were sent out upon his track.

That they had failed in their attempts to capture him, Blueskin and Jack thought but little of.

In their own minds they felt convinced that, however great an incentive a reward might be, yet it would not urge the officers forward with the same energy and determination as their own burning for revenge would.

Jonathan had much to answer for at their hands.

They would be avenging themselves at the same time that they were rendering society at large a most valuable service.

Such was the substance of the thoughts that passed through the minds of Blueskin and Jack, as they sat facing the Chancellor.

That individual had greatly moderated his opinion with regard to Blueskin, after the confessions that had been made to him that night.

Fortunately for Blueskin, the Chancellor was already in possession of many facts connected with the case; and all those things which Blueskin said, were, in some way or other, corroborated by what had been said by others, and those others were certainly no friends of his.

Therefore, the Chancellor was right in placing implicit reliance upon all that had been told him.

The satisfaction which Blueskin could not help feeling, at the prospect of his story being at last believed, was somewhat damped by the knowledge that belief had come too late.

He was now a ruined man—bankrupt in everything; and so far as his worldly position was concerned, it mattered little whether justice was rendered to him, or not.

Still, a pardon would be the greatest reward he could possibly receive.

When that had been granted to him, he should be able to live for the remainder of his life in peace and comfort, in his native land, and, as he hoped, in the service of his old and much-loved master's daughter.

Then, as for Jack Sheppard, the belief that he had been executed and was no more, was deeply rooted, so much

so, indeed, that in a few months' time there would be little fear of his being in any danger of detection; and so, in the future, everything promised to go well.

While they were thus busy felicitating themselves upon the prospect spread out before them, the carriage stopped.

Looking up, Blueskin and Jack saw that they were in the right street.

They at once alighted from the vehicle.

Jack was full of impatience, and he hastened to the door, and rung the bell violently.

He was delighted to think that Edgworth Bess was about to be so happy.

They would be parted, probably, for ever, but he did not care for that.

The door was opened by the landlady.

Jack took the candle from her hand, and led the way up the staircase.

Blueskin and the Chancellor followed.

Somehow, Jack's heart beat strangely when he stood upon the threshold of the room in which he had left Edgworth Bess.

But he thought nothing of the feeling, believing it to be merely caused by the prospect of a separation.

He paused for a moment before he opened the door, and this enabled Blueskin and the Chancellor to overtake him.

Then he turned the handle and opened the door.

The apartment was plunged in total darkness.

This seemed strange.

Again Jack's heart fluttered.

"What's the meaning of this?" cried Blueskin. "Why, it's dark!"

A horrible foreboding now came over Jack Sheppard; nevertheless, he managed to gasp out:

"It's all right! Come in—come in! I have a light!"

He strode forward as he spoke, and held the candle above his head, so that its beams should be diffused as much as possible.

He gave one hasty glance around the room.

Blueskin did the like.

"Why," said the latter, "she is not here!"

"No—no, she is not here!" said Jack, endeavouring to speak calmly, but failing altogether; "but she cannot be far off! She is in the inner room—that's where she is, of course!"

He tried to speak in a tone of confidence, as though he would cheat himself into believing the words he had uttered.

He strode across the room, and opened a door.

"Bess—Bess," he cried, "where are you?"

There was no response.

This room, like the other, was in total darkness.

"Is she not there?" said Blueskin, in a hollow voice.

The Chancellor looked around him suspiciously.

The conduct of the two men, in whom he had begun to place great faith and confidence, seemed strange.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he said. "Explain it!"

In spite of the horrible fears which struggled at his heart, Jack Sheppard still endeavoured to put a good face on the affair.

"She—she must have gone out!" he stammered. "She cannot have gone far—she must be close by!"

"But we cautioned her expressly against leaving," said Blueskin. "I begin to fear that something terrible is amiss!"

"I know it—I know it!" said Jack, with a deep groan; "my heart told me so from the first!"

He sank down in a chair as he spoke, and, covering his face with his hands, sobbed violently.

Blueskin trembled.

"This must be explained," said the Chancellor, in a stern voice. "I fear there is some treachery here—something is wrong."

He appeared to anticipate some personal danger, for he advanced quickly across the room to the window, and dashed it open.

In the street below was his carriage.

"Thomas," he cried, "and you, John—here—come quickly! I am in danger!"

The two footmen he addressed at once rushed into the house.

"You have nothing to fear, sir," said Blueskin, in a broken voice. "Something dreadful has happened!"

"What—what?"

"I will solemnly swear to you, sir, before all the whole world, that when I left this room, an hour or two ago, I left the heiress in it—left her, too, after saying that I should shortly return, and after strictly enjoining her on no account to go abroad."

The footmen now appeared at the door of the room.

"It's all right!" said the Chancellor. "Wait there outside until you hear me call."

Then, turning to Blueskin, he said:

"And now she is not here?"

"No—as you see."

"You can give no guess as to the cause of her disappearance?"

"None whatever."

"But the people in the house—can they not give any information?"

"I had not thought of that," said Blueskin. "The shock was too great for any calm reflection."

"Wait, then," said the Chancellor. "Perhaps I can to some extent dispel the doubt I feel. Thomas!"

The footman opened the door instantly.

"Call up the landlady at once! I will question her," said the Chancellor, turning to Blueskin, "and I hope I shall be confirmed in the good opinion I have formed of you."

Blueskin did not speak, but went towards Jack, and put his hand upon his shoulder.

The landlady, like all the rest of her race, was excessively curious to learn anything that concerned her lodgers.

She was close at hand, and there was but little delay in her making her appearance.

"Now, my good woman," said the Chancellor, "are you the occupier of this house?"

"I am, your worship, if you please, sir," said the woman, curtsying at every word, for she had conceived a very great idea of the Chancellor's importance, without knowing who he was—she had seen the magnificent carriage at the door, and the servants in their splendid liveries.

"That is enough, then," said the Chancellor. "Just answer the questions I shall put to you as briefly as possible—that is all I require."

"I will, sir," said the landlady, with two more curtsies.

"Then, when these two persons went out a little while ago," indicating Blueskin and Jack Sheppard as he spoke, "did they leave anyone else in the room?"

"Yes, yer worship, a young girl—or, I might say, a young woman."

"You are sure they left her here?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Have you seen her since they left?"

"Yes; once, when I came up into the room."

"How long ago is that?"

"An hour, sir, or melbe two."

"And she was here then?"

"Yes, yer worship—standin' by the winder."

"Well, where is she now?"

The landlady looked at her interrogator in blank astonishment.

The Chancellor repeated his question.

"I don't know, sir," she stammered. "Is she not here?"

"No."

"Then she must have left the house."

"That seems pretty clear; but how, or why, and when did you see her go? Answer me at once, and without prevarication! The matter is more important than you may perhaps imagine!"

A change came over the lodging-house keeper's face; she was evidently alarmed at the stern, abrupt manner in which the Chancellor spoke.

CHAPTER DLVI.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN RESOLVE TO SET OUT IN PURSUIT OF WILD.

"If—if—if you please, yer worship—" began the landlady, stammeringly.

"No hesitation!" said the Chancellor. "Speak at once!"

"Well, yer worship, she may have left the house, and she may not. I can't take upon myself to say. I didn't

see her go. I haven't seen her since about two hours ago, when I came up into the room."

"And you mean clearly and positively to say that you have not seen her since?"

"No, yer worship, I haven't."

"Nor heard her depart?"

"No."

"You see, my lord," said Blueskin, advancing, "I have told you the truth. The girl was here; but, by some means or other, which I am at a loss to comprehend, she has been spirited away."

When the lodging-house keeper heard the Chancellor addressed as "my lord," she began dropping curtsies at a fearful rate, and seemed as though she would never leave off.

"My good woman," said the Chancellor, "make every inquiry. Perhaps some one in the house can give intelligence about her."

"She may be in some other room," said Jack Sheppard, starting up, and dashing the tears impatiently from his eyes. "Perhaps, after all, we have been alarming ourselves without reason."

"That's a frail hope, Jack, and one that I am afraid will not be realised."

"Never mind! Let us accompany the landlady into every room in the house. Surely then we shall find some trace!"

"I will come too," said the Chancellor.

The landlady picked up the candle, and then remained in a state of great doubt and uncertainty.

She did not know whether she ought to precede or follow a lord, and she had the idea in her head that, if she made a mistake either in one way or the other, the consequences would be very serious.

She was relieved from her anxiety by the Chancellor himself, who said:

"Now, then, lead the way, and don't keep bobbing up and down in that extraordinary manner! You will put the candle out!"

"I would suggest," said Blueskin, "that we begin at the top of the house first."

"As you will."

The little party, followed up by the two footmen of the Chancellor, made their way up to the top of the house.

Nothing was found in the attics, which were two in number, and which were used as bed-rooms.

On the second floor were also two rooms.

They paused on this landing.

"If you please, yer ludship," said the landlady, "this floor is occupied by a gentleman. Perhaps he wouldn't object to your looking over 'is rooms."

"We can ask him," said Blueskin. "Knock at the door."

The landlady obeyed.

For a moment there was no response, and then some one said, in a thick, husky voice:

"Who's there? What do you want?"

"If you please, sir," said the landlady, "there's 'is ludship 'ere wishes to know if you 'ave a girl in your room."

A curious growling sound was heard by way of reply.

Although their minds were so seriously bent, yet all those who heard the landlady put her question so strangely could not forbear from smiling.

"What the devil is it to do with his lordship, or anyone else, whether I've got a girl in my room?" said the voice again.

"I'm afraid," said the landlady, in a terrified way, "that my lodger will be offended and leave. He is a very good lodger, your ludship—a little bit odd at times. I shouldn't like to lose 'im."

"It will be all right," said Blueskin. "I will put the question to him, and no offence shall be given."

Blueskin knocked at the door.

"What now?" said the growling voice again.

"We are searching for a young girl who has mysteriously disappeared," said Blueskin. "If you have no objection, we should like to search your rooms, without you will say that you have seen nothing of her."

"I have seen nothing of her," said the growling voice, "nor don't want to. I'll open the door and let you in, or I'd come out and talk to you, only you'll understand it's a queer time of night, and I'm not exactly in a condition to receive visitors."

"Never mind," said Blueskin. "If you have not seen her, that's all we require to know."

"I have not seen her," was the reply. "Wait a minute—I'll get up."

"No matter, sir," said Blueskin. "We are very sorry indeed for having disturbed you. It is quite sufficient. You need not trouble yourself."

Some more growling words followed, but what they were our friends did not know, for they could not stop to listen.

The next floor was the one which Blueskin and Jack had occupied.

This floor was thoroughly searched.

One thing they discovered for certain—that was, that Edgworth Bess was not there.

There were many traces of her late presence, but nothing that would serve them as a clue to her disappearance.

"She's gone!" said Blueskin—"gone as completely as if she had vanished into the air!"

Once more Jack sank down, overcome by his grief.

This was almost more than he could bear.

After making up his mind that all was well at last, it was indeed a bitter disappointment to find that she was gone. The house was searched, but without any result being produced.

All the persons in it were one by one interrogated, but no tidings whatever could be gleaned respecting the disappearance of the heiress.

The mystery was profound.

With sad and heavy steps they ascended to the room again.

"This all seems very strange," said the Chancellor, "and I know not what to think. I am half suspicious—but no matter—no matter! I am safe; no harm has been done to me. And as the girl you speak of cannot be produced, I have no more business here. Good night!"

He turned on his heel abruptly as he spoke these words, and descended the staircase rapidly.

Blueskin could not command himself to speak, nor could Jack Sheppard either.

They were stunned—bewildered by what had taken place.

Blueskin was the first to recover his composure, though some moments elapsed before he did so.

Jack Sheppard, with his hands clasped over his face, still sat in an attitude of the deepest dejection in the chair.

"Come—come, Jack," said Blueskin—"rouse up! To give way thus to grief is the merest folly! Be a man, Jack—be a man!"

There was no reply.

"This mystery must be cleared up," said Blueskin. "It seems impenetrable, but I trust it will not prove so."

Jack sprung to his feet.

"I see it all now!" he cried, in startling tones. "The whole is spread out clearly enough before me!"

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"Just what I say! Do not your own thoughts travel in the same direction as my own?"

"No—I am all abroad."

"This is Wild's work!" cried Jack, in an excited voice.

"I am sure of it! By some means or other, the villain has found out that Edgworth Bess was here, and has taken advantage of our absence to spirit her away!"

"But how—how?" cried Blueskin. "No—no, you must be mistaken—it cannot be!"

"It is—it is!"

"But he could not have taken her away without the knowledge of some of the people in this house!"

"He is no common man," said Jack. "Besides, you might as well say she could not have left the house at all without the knowledge of the people in it, and yet she is gone!"

"True," said Blueskin, in a changed tone.

The conviction began to come over him that Jack was right.

"Yes," continued Jack Sheppard, in more excited tones than he had hitherto employed, "this is Wild's work; I feel sure of it! He has been here—he has dealt this blow at the last moment!"

"But we ought to have some proof!" said Blueskin.

"Proof?" was the reply—"how can we wait for proof?"

We must act at once; every moment may be worth a lifetime!"

"What can be done?" asked Blueskin. "Where can we go?"

"That I know not! You remember our original intention? It was to hunt the villain down, and not to rest until we had placed him into the hands of the officers of justice! That is what we will do now!"

"Now?"

"Yes, at once!"

"But how shall we get upon his track?"

"That I cannot tell you! Who can say what may turn up? It was a sufficient stimulus to our exertions to follow him merely in order to avenge our wrongs; now we do it that we may once more obtain possession of Edgworth Bess, who I am certain is in his power. I feel more and more convinced of it every moment!"

"I begin to think so too," said Blueskin. "I cannot bring myself to believe that she left the place of her own accord!"

"No—no," said Jack. "I am sure nothing would have tempted her to do so!"

"I believe you are right. Some one, though in some strange and secret way, must have removed her, and who else could it be?—who else could have any aim or object in taking her away, than our old enemy, Jonathan Wild?"

"No one," replied Jack, wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement. "It is as clear as noonday! Jonathan Wild has been here and carried her off!"

"Yet stay," said Blueskin. "Events do seem to point to that conclusion; but how can we account for his having done this without the people in the house being aware of it? Surely, it cannot have been done without their knowledge?"

"No doubt the landlady of this place has gone over to his interests. We will call her, and threaten her if she does not at once declare what has become of her!"

The landlady was called, but no information could be elicited from her.

She solemnly declared, and over and over again repeated that she knew nothing of the mysterious disappearance of Edgworth Bess.

She was evidently as much astounded and bewildered at what had taken place as our friends were.

Jack was obliged to give up in despair.

"Be of good heart," said Blueskin. "Something must show up ere long that will put us on the right scent."

"It is all so mysterious!"

"It is."

"Jonathan Wild is a wonderful man!"

"True."

"Yet how he could have contrived to carry Edgworth Bess out of the house without anyone seeing him, passes my comprehension."

"And mine; though, if you reflect, you will find he has done even more wonderful things than this appears to be."

"You still cling to the idea that Jonathan Wild, and no one else, is concerned in her abduction?"

"I do feel sure of it! Every circumstance seems to point conclusively to it."

"I share your opinion; for, as we said before, it does not seem credible that Edgworth Bess should have left the house after receiving such strict injunctions from us, and no one else would feel interested in carrying her off except our old foe."

"I did hope we had heard the last of him."

"The gallows groans for him, my friend! Tyburn Tree must be graced with his carcass, some day or other!"

"But this talk is idle. We must do!"

"Come, then; I am ready! Luckily, we have money wherewith to accomplish our purpose."

"But where are we to look?"

"Let us go down and inquire."

The two friends descended.

The landlady kept out of their way.

Upon reaching the street, they looked up and down, but could see no one.

They found a watchman's box round the next corner, however.

Of course he was fast asleep.

When aroused, he was very angry.



[JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN MAKE A HORRIBLE DISCOVERY.]

He listened sulkily to the questions which our friends put to him, and when they had done speaking, he said: "You might think I was asleep when you came; but I wasn't! I know what goes on, and now I'll tell ye."

CHAPTER DLVII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD MEET WITH SOME STRANGE ADVENTURES IN THEIR PURSUIT OF JONATHAN WILD.

WHEREUPON the watchman told them—though not in a very lucid, straightforward, or satisfactory manner—that he had seen a man take away a young girl in a light, open trap.

He could give no particulars as to this man's appearance, because, as he said, the night was so very dark that he could not see.

Our two friends of course concluded that it must be no other than Jonathan Wild.

No. 119.—BLUESKIN.

The direction that had been taken was pointed out, and then they withdrew to consider.

"I told you I was right! The villain has stealthily carried her away! We must now mount, and ride off in pursuit!"

"Where shall we get horses?"

"Buy them—we have money enough."

"Agreed!"

"It would be unwise in the extreme to run the risk of getting ourselves into trouble over anything of that sort."

"Certainly it would; there is every necessity for the greatest caution."

"But where shall you be able to obtain them?"

"I must think for a moment. There are doubtless places not far off where we could get two good ones. The worst of it is, the hour is so late."

Blueskin and Jack walked on rapidly, until presently they came to some livery stables.

Here they paused, and after some little hesitation, Blueskin said:

"You have money enough no doubt, to buy what is required. Wrap your cloak closely around you, and make the inquiry. It will be better for you to go—there is little fear that you will be recognised."

To this, Jack assented.

Upon gaining the stable yard he found it silent and deserted.

There was a lamp burning over one of the doors, however, and close by the door itself was the ostler's bell.

He rung it several times, and finally a man appeared in the room above.

Upon learning Jack's business, he descended.

"I want two horses immediately," said Jack. "But as you don't know who I am, and as I can't tell how long I shall be absent, and when I shall be able to return, I want to know in what way you can accommodate me?"

The stable-keeper scratched his head.

"There is only one way that I can see."

"What is that?"

"You had better buy two horses."

"Have you two to sell?"

"Yes, or half a dozen."

"I only want two, so we will say agreed."

"Come this way then, sir; this is the stable. You can have a look at all the horses, and choose the two you like the best."

"I shall want saddles, and bridles, and trappings all complete," he said.

"Oh yes, of course."

"Now, what do you ask for the lot?" said Jack. "You must be quick and reasonable."

"I can't take anything less than thirty pounds a-piece for them."

"Then I shall have to go elsewhere," said Jack; "I have only fifty pounds. If you like to sell me the two horses for that amount, you shall have it."

After some haggling, this was consented to.

Jack paid the money, and the two horses were led out into the yard.

Blueskin now approached.

There was no need for him to say anything, and the darkness of the place was so great, that there was not much fear of his being recognised.

As time was an object of importance, they mounted at once, and galloped off down the road in the direction the watchman had pointed out; but before they had gone far they came to a place where the roads divided, and here they were completely at fault.

It is true they found a watchman near this spot, but he could give them no intelligence whatever.

He had not seen any vehicle answering to their description for several hours.

Jack and Blueskin were now compelled to trust entirely to their luck.

They had nothing whatever to guide them.

One road was just as likely to have been taken as the other, and so, quite at random, they turned their horses' heads in the direction of Croydon.

The night was dark yet clear.

The stars were shining brightly in the sky, and they could see around them with tolerable distinctness.

But little was said by the two friends.

Their hearts were heavy, and their thoughts busy, still they had nothing to converse about.

Each felt an inward conviction that they were going upon what might really be called, a "wild-geese chase."

And there was one thing of which they were ignorant, and which they did not even suspect: the watchman they had appealed to in the first instance had wilfully deceived them.

He had been fast asleep for a length of time, and knowing that if this could be proved he would be in danger of losing his situation, he gave the two friends false information. He had never seen anything of a light cart with a man and a woman in it—it was entirely a fiction coined in his own brain; and when, to his satisfaction, Blueskin and Jack went off so briskly, he rubbed his hands in a satisfied manner, and, sitting down in his box, composed himself to sleep once more.

At the first toll-gate they came to, Jack, with his face still concealed by the large cloak he wore, asked the toll-

keeper whether anyone answering to Wild's description had passed through the gate during the night.

"I am quite certain," said the tollman, who, for a wonder, was a civil fellow, "that no one of the appearance you describe has been past here to-night. I have been keeping watch all the time, and have opened the gate to everyone that has gone by."

Upon receipt of this intelligence, our two friends withdrew a little distance for consultation.

"We must turn back," said Jack; "there is no help for it. I will take this man's word, and if he has not seen Jonathan Wild, of what good will it be for us to gallop along in this direction?"

"None whatever."

"Then we must turn our horses' heads, and retrace our steps."

This was done reluctantly, for it was vexatious in the highest degree to think that they had galloped so far unnecessarily.

They at last reached the spot where the road divided.

They had two more to choose from.

One took a north-westerly direction, and the other led to London.

This last, it was considered, would certainly not be the road taken by Jonathan Wild.

Once having his prisoner secure in his clutches, his first step, they judged, would be to get into some obscure part of the country.

A consideration of this circumstance induced them to take the road we have mentioned as running to the north-west.

In a little while London was completely left behind, but still they failed to see or hear any sign of Jonathan Wild.

Presently, however, they saw in the distance something in the middle of the high-road which looked dim and shadowy.

What it was, they could not at first take upon themselves to say.

It was an unusual object certainly, and therefore they slackened speed.

"It looks like a vehicle of some sort," said Blueskin, shading his eyes with his hand. "But if it is, it is at a standstill in the middle of the road."

"That is strange."

"Very! Come forward gently. Perhaps even now we are upon the brink of discovering something."

Jack's heart beat hard and fast.

The disappointment he had met with up to the present moment made him exceedingly uneasy and alarmed.

Now, however, something seemed to tell him that this vehicle in front was in some way connected with the poor girl's fate.

Closer and closer they drew, and then Blueskin's supposition was proved to be correct.

It was a vehicle in the middle of the road, and it was also perfectly still.

"It is a post-chaise," said Blueskin. "Come forward quietly. How silent all seems! What can it mean?"

Closer and closer still they came, until, at length, they reined-in their horses close to the hind-wheels of the vehicle.

No notice whatever had been taken of their approach.

There was no movement—no sound; but when they pulled up, a cry of horror and surprise burst involuntarily from their lips.

Then they were silent, and with straining eyes they gazed upon the extraordinary spectacle before them.

Lying on the ground at full length, on his back, was a man attired in the costume of a postilion.

By his side was quite a large pool of dark-coloured blood; but this was all.

The door of the post-chaise was swinging wide open.

Lying half in and half out of the vehicle was a man attired as in those days only people of rank and fashion were.

His dress was of the richest description, and trimmed in many places with gold lace, while a star, attached by a ribbon to the breast of his coat, seemed to show that he belonged to some order.

His feet and legs lay on the bottom of the post-chaise, while his head and his shoulders rested strangely on the ground.

Around this person, too, a quantity of blood had collected.

It could be seen at a glance that he was either dead, or else in a state of total insensibility closely resembling it.

This, then, was the extraordinary and unexpected sight which Blueskin and Jack beheld; and it is not to be wondered at that they should be, for a minute or two, motionless with horror.

A dreadful deed had been committed.

Jack drew a long breath.

"This is an unexpected sight!" he said.

"Yes," replied Blueskin; "and an awful one! There has been a tragedy enacted here; but I fear we shall never know much more concerning it than we do now."

"Then let us push forward," said Jack Sheppard. "I was in hopes that this concerned us in some way, but I find now that it does not."

"Don't be too sure of that, Jack," said Blueskin. "A few minutes' delay can be of no particular importance, especially as we have not anything like a clue to the whereabouts of our foe."

"Still, the less delay the better."

"I agree with you in that—let us avoid all unnecessary delays; but, unless I am mistaken, I think we shall find, upon a closer search, something that will tell us whether we are on the right scent, or not."

"I trust it may be so."

"Dismount, then," said Blueskin. "Secure your horse to the back of the post-chaise. We will then take a look round. No doubt there's more to be seen than meets the eye at the first glance."

Jack complied, though rather reluctantly.

It was his opinion that they would be able to satisfy their curiosity to some extent, but nothing more.

However, he followed Blueskin's example, and secured his horse by the bridle to the back of the post-chaise.

"Follow me!" said Blueskin. "We will go round to the other side of the vehicle."

This was in order to avoid passing too close to the two dead bodies.

The post-chaise had not stopped quite in the centre of the road, but rather to one side of it, and it was on this side that the two bodies lay.

Upon getting round to the front of the vehicle, they noted with surprise that the traces had been cut, and the horses had vanished.

"A daring deed this!" said Blueskin. "Surely it is not long since it took place, or it would have been discovered."

They then came round to the other side, where the door was swinging open.

They approached, and, after a momentary reluctance, determined to ascertain whether either of these unfortunate beings was alive.

They went first to the gentleman whose body was in such a strange position.

They laid him out upon his back in the road.

He was quite warm; and this made them think that he was still alive.

Bending down over him, however, they saw a small round hole in his forehead, from which the blood was still oozing.

"It's a case!" said Blueskin. "He's dead, sure enough. That bullet must have gone quite through his brain."

"So I see. But how warm the body is."

"Yes; that shows the deed has only just been committed."

"And his pockets, do you observe they are turned inside out?"

"Yes. Is the postilion alive, I wonder?"

"That we can soon ascertain. I fancy not. First of all, let us look inside the post-chaise: it may be that we shall see something else there."

"Let us go round to the other door, then," said Blueskin; "we can open that and look in without the necessity of standing over this gentleman's corpse."

"With all my heart," said Jack. "I can't help being strongly and strangely interested in this affair; but yet I am anxious that we should make haste; it is quite time we were off."

CHAPTER DLVIII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD FIND DANGER THICKENING AROUND THEM.

It took but a moment to gain the other side of the post-chaise, and then Blueskin took hold of the handle.

He turned it round, and then, very much to his surprise, the door opened, forcing him backwards as though some heavy weight was pushing against it.

A loud cry came from Jack Sheppard's lips.

They had indeed found something else inside the post-chaise, and the discovery was an appalling one.

It showed that they had not yet fully comprehended the dire tragedy.

As soon as ever the door was opened, something fell with a dull and heavy crash into the roadway.

It lay there perfectly still in a huddled-up mass.

One glance, however, was sufficient to show that it was the body of a female.

She had on a light dress, with some light-coloured wrapper or shawl thrown over it, but these garments were all stained with blood.

"Another murder!" gasped Blueskin. "This is truly horrible!"

"There is no life here, I think," said Jack. "Come forward."

Blueskin had stepped back several paces, but now, with a strange fluttering about his heart, he advanced.

He bent down, and, overcoming his repugnance as well as he was able, looked more closely at the huddled-up mass.

The light-coloured shawl, or whatever the garment was, had fallen over the face, and, stooping down, Blueskin, with a trembling hand, removed it.

A fair and beautiful countenance was then disclosed.

But it was distorted, as though by an access of bodily anguish.

Nevertheless, traces of great beauty remained.

"She's dead!" said Blueskin—"dead, beyond a doubt! What do you think of all this, Jack?"

"It is truly an appalling discovery!"

"It is; but, more than that, it seems to prove to me that we are on the right track."

"How so?"

"Does not this horrible spectacle look like Jonathan Wild's work?"

"It does—it does!"

"Who else but such a villain could have committed so atrocious and cold-blooded a deed as this?"

"No one, Jack! Depend upon it, Jonathan Wild has been here, and this is the mark he has left behind him!"

"There has been robbery as well as murder!"

"Yes; and in committing one crime he would not scruple to commit the other! It is unsatisfactory as well as dreadful to find all three in such a state as this! How much better it would have been for us if one of them had retained sufficient life to be able to give us some explanation of this tragedy, and to have described the person by whom it was perpetrated."

"It would," said Blueskin. "And I am not without the hope that we shall obtain that information!"

"How so?"

"You forget the postilion!"

"No, I do not; but I have little hope that you will be able to obtain any information from him! If his face isn't that of a dead man, I never saw one!"

"Look inside the post-chaise, Jack, and then we will go to him and see! Surely no other horrible discovery awaits us!"

As the post-chaise inclined to one side, one door swung open while the other was shut.

Jack pulled it open and looked in, but there was nothing else to be seen.

The interior was stained with blood; but they could not see any object within it.

Accordingly, in pursuance of their intention, they made their way round once more to the other side.

The postilion lay exactly in the same position.

"He is warm," said Blueskin, as he touched him. "He has been shot in the breast. I fear the wound is mortal, yet he may be recovered. Can you see any water?"

"There's a ditch by the roadside."

"Well, get a little clean water from that if you can. We will dash it on his face."

Jack picked up the postilion's hat, which was the only thing he could see that he could carry water in.

The ditch by the roadside in many respects resembled a stream, for it was three-parts full of water, and it was tolerably clean.

Jack filled the hat, and poured the contents over the postilion's face.

There was a slight shiver all over his frame, and then a groan issued from his lips.

In the hope that they should be able to obtain some information from him, Blueskin gently raised him to a half-sitting posture.

The man groaned again as though the movement had produced exquisite pain.

Then he opened his eyes.

"Speak," said Blueskin—"speak if you possibly can, and tell us how it has happened that you have got into this plight."

It was evident from the postilion's manner that he comprehended the words which had just been addressed to him.

He made several attempts to speak, but could not.

He seemed choking.

"Fetch some more water, Jack," said Blueskin, who thought he might be able to pour a little down his throat.

Jack hurried off, and soon returned.

The postilion thanked them for the water with an impressive glance.

He wanted it, but could not ask.

Again and again he tried to speak, but only half-articulate groans came from his lips.

He still seemed choking, and then suddenly, just when Blueskin imagined he was about to speak, a quantity of blood gushed forth from his lips.

Then he shivered again, and the muscles in his neck relaxing, his head fell forward upon his breast.

"It is no good, Blueskin," said Jack. "He's dead!"

"Alas, yes! I regret now that we did not attend to him at first. If we had done so, we might perchance have obtained the information so important to us."

"You are sure he is dead?"

"Oh yes, quite! He will never speak again!"

Blueskin placed the body in its original position, and then, standing upright, he said:

"Well, Jack, it seems pretty clear that we can do ourselves no good by remaining here."

"None whatever. Let us hasten forward."

"By all means," said Blueskin. "We should find it very awkward if we were discovered near this place."

"We should. A horrible discovery awaits some one! Hark! What is that?"

They listened.

"Horses' feet!" said Jack. "Police officers, I should say by the sound, or perhaps they may be only travellers. In either case, the sooner we get off the better!"

"Yes, mount at once!"

The horses were unfastened, and the two friends sprang into the saddles.

The post-chaise was quickly left behind.

They sped on down the road in a straight line.

Although disappointed at not being able to learn anything definite, yet they were in better spirits and more confident than they had been previously.

This was because they fully believed that they had got upon the thief-taker's track.

Such a horrible crime as had evidently been committed could be the work of no one else, therefore they felt the greatest encouragement to proceed.

Of the horsemen they heard approaching they saw nothing.

Of course they would stop as soon as ever they came to the post-chaise.

Still, as they galloped on, and as the night passed away, the two friends became saddened, for they met with no further traces of the thief-taker.

In the east, signs of the coming day could already be seen.

At length, on making their way up a very long and very steep hill, they paused upon its summit, in order to allow their horses to recover their wind.

Their horses showed palpable signs of great distress.

By degrees the grey, chill light of morning began to creep over the whole landscape, bringing into view the various objects of which it was composed.

The summit of the hill upon which they had halted commanded a most extensive prospect.

For many a mile the country could be seen around them.

Both shaded their eyes with their hands, in order to see more clearly, and then took a long and careful look around them.

But although their gaze rested successively upon every road, and lane, and meadow around, yet they failed nevertheless to catch a glimpse of their old enemy.

It was in a sad, almost heart-broken tone that Jack Sheppard let his hands fall to his side, and said to his companion:

"Alas! I can see nothing of him!"

"Nor I," said Blueskin, "but we must not despair, for all that! The task we have set ourselves is one of no common difficulty, and it would be ridiculous to suppose that we shall be able to succeed all at once."

"I know that," said Jack.

"Still, from your impatient manner, I think it is well that you should be reminded of it. You should not forget, too, that, for a length of time, Jonathan Wild has set all the police officers in the kingdom at defiance, and it is too much to suppose that we should succeed immediately where they have failed."

"I grant all that," said Jack, "but find myself unable to derive any consolation from it. He is a monster in human form!"

"Of that, Jack, there can be no doubt."

"There could not be after the events of to-night. Who but such a villain could have perpetrated such a horrible and atrocious deed?"

"No one."

"Imagine, then, what it must be to feel one's self wholly in the power and wholly at the mercy of such a man, as Edgworth Bess must be!"

"I do not think too much upon it, Jack, or it would drive me mad! There is no barbarity—no crime—no villainy that he would scruple to be guilty of."

"I am distressed," said Jack, "when I think of it. Here we are upon this road in all probability miles and miles away from where he now is, and at this very moment, while we are standing idly here, poor Edgworth Bess is no doubt in urgent need of our protection and assistance!"

"We must not dwell upon that, Jack, but make up our minds that, let the difficulty be ever so great, we will discover it!"

"And then," said Jack, looking behind him, "I can't help thinking in what a dangerous position we are ourselves. My existence, it is true, is not suspected, but no doubt the police officers are looking anxiously in every direction for yourself."

"No doubt of that," said Blueskin. "I have been out of sight for a long while, but yet not long enough for the police officers to forget me."

"Very true. Now look back upon the road. What is that coming along so swiftly?"

It was rather difficult to look back, because the sun, which was just rising above the horizon, was shining full in their faces.

Nevertheless, Blueskin gazed for a moment, and then said suddenly:

"They are police officers, Jack, coming along the road at full speed! You may depend they are part of the party we heard just before we left the post-chaise. They have discovered it and come on in pursuit. If we are seen, we shall get the credit of this deed, and we shall never be able to prove that we have not committed it! Forward! Our thought now must be flight!"

"Yes," said Jack, "forward at once, for from our elevated position, and from the fact of the sun shining full upon us, we must be distinctly visible to the officers."

"Well, we will not be much longer. Now, Jack, spur your horse hard—everything depends upon speed!"

Jack obeyed, and in another second the two friends were tearing down the hill at a speed that was absolutely terrific.

"The worst of it is," shouted Blueskin, as they reached the level ground, "that the officers will be able to see miles off as soon as they get to the top of the hill!"

"They are not there yet," cried Jack. "Look around you. Is there no means by which we can baffle or elude them?"

"None that I see," said Blueskin. "Forward—forward! We are too close to the foot of the hill to do anything."

At the same desperate rate they tore along the high-road, and at every few minutes both would turn their heads and look behind them, expecting every time that they would perceive the officers upon the summit of the hill.

CHAPTER DLIX.

WILD JUNIOR MAKES AN IMPORTANT AND UNLOOKED-FOR DISCOVERY.

GEORGE WILD found himself quite comfortable in his new lodgings, and no doubt he would have remained here in comfort and security for a considerable length of time, but he knew that in a very short time the end of his resources would be reached; therefore it was necessary for him to ponder over the future.

He was moved to do this also by a certain restlessness of disposition, which would never allow him to remain long idle or quiet.

"I must find out what's become of the gov'nor," he said, on the day following his arrival at his lodgings. "D—n him, he always was a trouble to me, and I suppose he always will be!"

After making this extraordinary remark, Wild junior remained for some time silent. No doubt he was in deep reflection.

Then, having made up his mind to a certain course, he said:

"I'll find out what I can about him. I'll send for a newspaper—not that that will be much good, for those chaps that write to the papers are such d—d liars!"

George rung the bell, and desired the landlady to obtain him a newspaper.

This was an unusual request, and made the woman stare with astonishment, for in those days it was quite a curiosity to catch sight of a newspaper.

"Go and get one," said Wild—"I want one very particularly."

The landlady withdrew, and towards evening appeared with a small, dirty-brown sheet of paper.

Wild seized it with avidity, and looked over its contents.

It was called the *Flying Post*, and appeared regularly every week, which was considered a wonderful thing in those days.

He came at length to an article which described at full length a desperate attempt to capture Jonathan Wild and his companion Mr. Noakes, and which had failed in consequence of the determined resistance they had made.

As a matter of course, the account ended with an assurance that they had good reason for believing that the two offenders would in a short time be in safe custody.

"I wonder what the gov'nor's up to?" said Wild junior, as he laid down the paper reflectively. "His stupid old head is at work at something, I know. What's he stopping in England for? Why don't he cut and run for it?"

George found himself unable to answer these questions, so at length he gave up in despair.

"I must do something for myself, at any rate," he said, at length. "It won't do for me to go on in this sort of way. If the gov'nor was only comfortably out of sight, and I felt sure I had the field clear to myself, I should know better how to set to work."

He was silent for a long while.

Then again he muttered his thoughts aloud.

"There's that girl—that heiress to the estates. That was as good a scheme as ever was planned by anybody. I'll give the gov'nor credit so far, and it was a thousand pities that anything should interfere with the carrying out of it; but I suppose it's all over with that. I wonder where the girl is."

This was another question that defied solution.

"If I could find her," he said, slowly—"get possession of her—marry her, in spite of all resistance, I should be pretty right. I shouldn't come in for the title, but I don't care a d—n for that! I should come in for the chink, which is better!"

George was greatly pleased at this prospect; and the more he thought over it, the more desirous he felt of succeeding in obtaining possession of the heiress.

"It may be done yet," he said. "Who can tell? I have been away from London a long while, which is awkward, for I don't know as I should do what has taken place. After all, I'm inclined to think well of it. If I could only marry her, I should then be able to set the gov'nor and all the rest of the world at defiance. She's the genuine heiress—there's no mistake about that,—I have fully satisfied myself upon that point. All that I have to do is to obtain possession of her; but, for the life of me, I can't tell how it is to be managed!"

Wild lighted his pipe, for he fancied that if he smoked for awhile it would quicken his inventive faculties.

But on this occasion the stimulant failed to produce its accustomed effects.

He was altogether abroad in the matter.

He knew not which way to turn nor in what direction to look for this heiress; and, for all he knew, she might already have been made the inheritor of her father's possessions; and if so, why, his plan would fall to the ground.

"It's no good for me to puzzle my brain about this matter to-night," he said. "I'll go to bed now, and when morning comes I will slightly disguise myself, and go out in search of information. I shall be sure to find something out. Yes, that must be it!"

Fully intending to retire to rest, George Wild rose, and put his pipe on the chimneypiece.

He had taken two rooms upon the second floor of the lodging-house, one of which was in the front, and used for a sitting-room, and the other at the back, and used for a bed-room.

Therefore, it follows that, in order to gain his sleeping apartment, he had to quit his sitting-room and cross the landing.

As he was doing this, he heard some one singing in a low and plaintive tone of voice.

What the words were he could not distinguish, but yet the sad, low voice seemed strangely familiar to him. He stood upon the landing as though suddenly transformed to stone.

He listened with eager intentness until the voice ceased to sing.

Wild's countenance lighted up with fresh hope, and he clenched his hands tightly.

"I am mad, or dreaming, or asleep, or drunk, or something!" he said, through his clenched teeth. "And yet, no—I am not! I am calm, and in my sober senses! I heard her singing—I'm sure of it! That was her voice!"

He trembled with excitement, and yet, although he felt so sure that he was not mistaken, strange doubts came over his mind.

"This is too good to be real," he said. "I can't believe that I have been favoured by my good luck so far as to come into the very house where she is! And yet, why not? Strange coincidences frequently occur, and this may be one of them."

The voice then began to sing again, and, as he listened to the faint, sad notes, George Wild became more and more convinced that his fancy was not deluding him.

He stood there for a moment wondering how to act and what to do to turn these circumstances to the greatest advantage.

"She's there," he said, "in this house, and in an apartment not far from this. I must secure her—but how?"

That was indeed difficult to decide, for of course it was impossible for Wild junior to tell whether Edgworth Bess was alone or not.

If he could only have made sure that none of her friends were at hand, and ready to render her assistance, he would have entered the apartment without hesitation.

The sorrowful voice of the singer seemed to have the effect of arresting all Wild's movements, for during the whole of the time he stood on the landing listening.

At length she was once more silent.

"Let the risk be what it will, I will go down!" he muttered. "I will enter the room, and either by force or fraud make her a prisoner! Yes—that's my course; and when I have accomplished that much, the remainder will be easy!"

Slowly and stealthily, Wild junior commenced the descent of the stairs.

He had got about half-way down the flight leading from the second to the first floor, when he stopped suddenly.

He heard some one ascending.

It would never do for him to be seen loitering there, nor would it do for him to attempt to carry out his purpose just at that moment; and so, with a muttered exclamation on his lips, he turned round, and hastily crept up to his own room again.

He reached it unperceived, and standing just within it, with the door partly open and his head half out, he looked down the staircase, in order to ascertain who it was he had heard coming up.

It was the landlady.

She paused on the first-floor landing, and having knocked at the door of one of the rooms, entered.

Wild stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost, but as the door was closed, no sound reached him.

Then, all at once, a fresh thought occurred to him.

His own sitting-room was immediately over the one the landlady had just entered.

It was not carpeted all over, but strips were laid down here and there.

As quick as thought, he closed the door and laid himself down at full length.

He placed his ear close to the boards, and then listened.

He grinned with satisfaction.

This plan succeeded admirably.

The sound of voices in the room below ascended, and his ear being placed where it was, enabled him to hear all.

He could not distinguish each word, however, but only a continuous sound.

In this way he recognised one voice to be that of the landlady, and the other that of Edgeworth Bess.

He listened for several moments, anxious to know whether any third person would take a share in the conversation.

At last, he heard the landlady leave the room and close the door, and then he came to the conclusion that Edgeworth Bess was the sole occupant of the apartment.

His brain was in a whirl.

He was like one suddenly receiving unexpected and joyful intelligence, which he hoped and believed was true, and yet feared that it was not.

He could scarcely believe that such good luck had befallen him.

"I will hesitate no longer," he said. "The matter shall be settled either one way or the other. I will go down at once. If I have been making a mistake—if my ears have deceived me—it will be no serious matter. I have got myself out of a worse difficulty than that can possibly be."

Once more, then, Wild made his way on to the landing.

He listened, but this time he heard no sounds of any one ascending to interrupt him.

Cautiously he crept down step by step, and in another minute more stood upon the landing on the first floor.

And now the voice began to sing again.

Of course, George heard with much greater plainness than he had yet done, and he felt quite certain in his own mind that he was not mistaken.

He placed his hand upon the knob.

It trembled slightly as he did so, for his excitement was so great that he could not control it.

"I must be careful to a degree in all my movements," he thought, "and speedy too. If she gives the least alarm or makes the least noise, the chance is lost."

George took a pistol from his pocket, and cocked it.

This he held in his right hand.

His left still rested upon the knob.

Suddenly he turned it.

The latch was raised.

Then, quick as thought, he opened the room door, closed it after him, placed his back against it, and exclaimed, in a hoarse, hissing whisper:

"One word—one cry—a single sound—and your fate is sealed!"

All this was done with a rapidity that cannot be described. It seemed instantaneous.

But his menacing words and attitude appeared to produce their due effect, for no alarm was given—all was as silent as the grave.

CHAPTER DLX.

IN WHICH THE MYSTERY OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF EDGWORTH BESS IS FULLY ELUCIDATED.

FATE—chance—accident,—call it what you will,—had indeed and in truth brought George Wild to the very house in Westminster where Blueskin, Jack Sheppard, and Edgeworth Bess had taken up their quarters.

It was a strange coincidence, but many as strange, or even stranger, happen every day.

It is so long ago since we mentioned the arrival of Edgeworth Bess in this place that it may be as well to remind the reader of the few particulars connected with it.

Jack and Blueskin were both of opinion that in this obscure street they had found a secure asylum from their foes.

After staying for a few days without meeting with any molestation, Jack had announced his determination of setting out in pursuit of Jonathan Wild.

In spite of the tears and entreaties of Edgeworth Bess, he had remained firm to his purpose, and, as soon as dusk had come, quitted the house.

They strictly enjoined her before parting to remain in her room, and upon no account to go abroad, promising that, in three or four days at the utmost, they would certainly return.

It will doubtless be recollected that Blueskin and Jack went direct to Wild's house in Newgate Street, in the hope of obtaining some kind of clue to his whereabouts.

It was then that they had seen the bill offering the reward respecting Edgeworth Bess, and this caused them to make a change in their plans.

Instead of commencing their pursuit of Jonathan Wild there and then, they resolved to delay it, and went to the Lord Chancellor's.

What happened after that is already known.

After the departure of her friends, Edgeworth Bess remained, sad and sorrowful, seated by the fire.

She had no inclination to go abroad, and there was little fear that she would disobey the injunctions she had received in this respect.

She was in a state of the greatest agitation and alarm.

Strive as she would, she could not compose herself—in fact, she fancied, as the minutes passed slowly by, that the feeling of uneasiness increased.

There was nothing for her to do by which she could cheat time of its tediousness.

Then, after a long time, she fancied she would try to sing.

This, she thought, might have a cheering effect upon her spirits.

She began, then, an old plaintive ditty, which she had remembered from infancy.

During the time of her long captivity in the thief-taker's house, in Newgate Street, she had beguiled the tedium of many an hour by singing this ballad.

This at once explains how it was that George Wild so quickly and readily recognised her voice.

During the time of her imprisonment he was in the adjoining room keeping guard, and he had heard her sing this same song very often.

But growing tired in a little while of this amusement, she had summoned the landlady.

This simple act produced more important results than she could possibly have expected, for it prevented George Wild from entering the room.

Edgeworth Bess called the landlady to know whether she could be furnished with a book, in order that she might attempt to amuse herself by reading.

In those days, however, books were much scarcer things than now, and the landlady informed her lodger that she had not such a thing in the house.

After an unimportant conversation, she retired, and Edgeworth Bess, resuming her seat by the fireside, sat for some time in silence, and then half-unconsciously broke out into the same song.

Then, as we are already aware, George Wild opened the door and entered.

So sudden was his appearance that he might have been taken for an apparition, or something supernatural.

Upon hearing the door open, Edgeworth Bess instinctively turned round to look.

Her first impulse was to utter a loud shriek of alarm.

The dim light that was in the apartment fell upon the brutal-looking countenance of George Wild.

She recognised him instantly.

But the scream she wished to utter seemed frozen on her lips.

In vain she tried to cast off the kind of spell which had fallen upon her.

She could not.

She sat there without moving—almost without breathing.

Her terror was so great, she seemed changed to stone.

There was no occasion for Wild to have uttered those threatening words—his appearance was quite sufficient to freeze up all the poor girl's faculties.

Finding that he had succeeded so far, Wild junior, with a grin of triumph on his face, strode swiftly forward.

As he did so, he took from his neck the thick neckcloth he habitually wore.

It was already folded up in the shape of a broad bandage, and, in a second, he threw it over the poor girl's head, and tied it tightly at the back.

Her mouth was now firmly closed, and even if she had recovered her voice she could not have made herself heard.

He pressed also upon her nostrils, and she was in imminent danger of suffocation.

Believing that, as he had succeeded so far, the remainder would be simple, George said :

"Rise!—follow me noiselessly, and at once! Do not hesitate!—do not attempt to refuse or resist! If you do, you will repent it!"

But Edgworth Bess had lost not only all power over her voice, but over her limbs also.

Had her life depended upon it, she could not have risen in obedience to Wild junior's commands.

She trembled excessively.

Then George placed his hand rudely on her shoulder, and attempted to raise her to her feet.

That was enough.

She could bear no more, and she sank back in the chair in a deep swoon.

For a moment, Wild junior did not comprehend her condition, but as soon as he did so, he said :

"Perhaps it is as well, or even better, thus. I can manage with all the more secrecy and certainty."

By a great effort of strength, he lifted Edgworth Bess in his arms, and walked with her out of the room on to the landing.

She exhibited not one symptom of life.

He paused on the landing a moment, and closed the door.

The most difficult part of the proceeding was now before him.

He had to carry her downstairs, for he was resolved, now that he had got her in his power, that he would leave the house without a moment's delay, for fear Blueskin and Jack should return.

But he was forced to abandon this intention, for he heard a loud knocking at the front door, and then voices in the passage.

"Curse it!" he cried. "I am balked! I must wait for another opportunity!"

The footsteps and voices in the passage below came towards the stairs.

He felt pretty sure that these persons were about to ascend.

What, then, should he do under this posture of affair?

His first thought was that he would enter the room again, and then he remembered he would run a very great risk of detection.

He had only one resource, and no time for deliberation.

He feared that his strength would never be sufficient to enable him to carry his prisoner up the flight of stairs into his own room, and yet he must either do that or be detected.

Of course, when she was once in his room, all would be well; he would be in but little danger of discovery.

Summoning all his strength for this one tremendous effort, Wild junior placed Edgworth Bess partially over his shoulder, and hastened up the stairs.

Fortunately they were only twelve in number; but he

felt, as he ascended one after another, as though he must certainly fall backwards.

But he gained the top.

His room door was open.

He entered and closed it after him with the rapidity of thought.

All was safe now, but he was not one moment too soon; in fact, had he been any later than he was, he must have been seen by those ascending.

These, as the reader may suspect, were no others than Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, who had brought the Lord Chancellor with them.

Had they but arrived one moment sooner than they did, what a world of misery and suffering would have been saved!

With what followed the arrival of Blueskin and Jack, the reader has already been made acquainted, and the disappearance of Edgworth Bess will no longer be a mystery.

Upon gaining his room, George Wild immediately placed his insensible prisoner upon a chair, and then, full of anxiety and impatience, hastened to the door, and ventured to open it a little way.

He had some half-formed suspicion in his mind that the new comers must be the friends of Edgworth Bess, but the time it took him to place Edgworth Bess upon the chair and to glide to the door had sufficed for the little party to enter the room on the floor below, and therefore he was not able to overhear anything.

"They will discover her disappearance much sooner than I expected. How cursedly unfortunate! Never mind! Perhaps, after all, things will turn out for the best!"

George remained at the door of his room, listening, for some time, nor did he draw in his head and close it until he heard them ascending the stairs.

He then closed and locked it, and, with a beating heart, awaited the result.

It will be remembered how they paused upon the landing on the second floor, and how the questions they asked were replied to by some one in a gruff tone of voice, who took care not to show himself.

This person with the gruff voice was, of course, no other than George Wild.

Had our friends insisted upon entering that room, they would have discovered all at a glance, but, as we know, they had not the least suspicion in this quarter, and, after the exchange of a few words, they descended the stairs, and afterwards left the house.

It was not until he had satisfied himself that they had all really and truly gone that Wild junior ventured to draw along breath.

"That's a relief!" he said. "And now that I have succeeded so far, I think I can manage the rest of the business comfortably."

He went back to the chair upon which Edgworth Bess was sitting.

Her death-like swoon still continued, and he grew so alarmed at her corpse-like appearance that he thought he had better remove the bandage from her face.

It was well that he did this, for the poor girl was in great danger of suffocation.

When the cloth was removed, she showed signs of returning vitality.

George Wild watched her eagerly, and while he did so, his thoughts were very busy.

"I'll get out of this house at once," he said. "I can't leave it too soon, and the greater distance I place between it and myself, the better it will be. They may grow suspicious. How do I know but that in a few minutes they may return, having taken it into their heads to search this chamber? Yes, I'll go at once, or rather as soon as she recovers sufficiently to accompany me!"

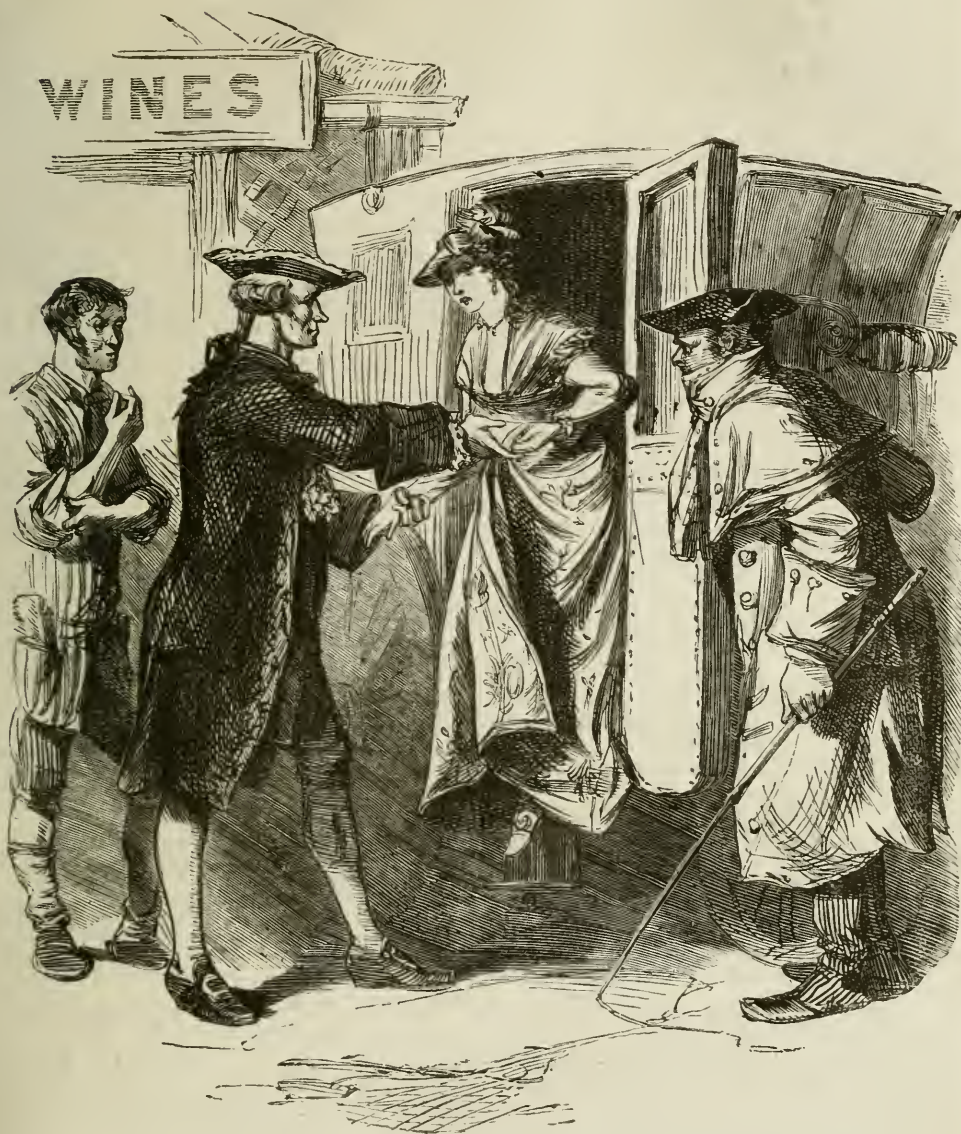
George did not know exactly what to do to assist the return of Edgworth Bess to consciousness, and even if he had, the remedies were not at hand.

He had no resource, therefore, but to wait and let nature take her proper course.

Very gradually, and very slowly, then, Edgworth Bess regained possession of her senses, and opening her eyes, she gave a terrified glance around her.

"Silence!" said George, in a threatening voice—

"silence, or your life will pay the forfeit!"



[WILD JUNIOR ARRIVES WITH HIS CAPTIVE AT THE LONESOME INN.]

In another moment, George Wild was seated with his captive in the vehicle.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver.

"Drive towards the Edgware Road," said Wild junior. "You can't take me so far as I want to go. Stop when you find another hackney-coach."

"Oh, I'll go, sir," said the driver, "now I've made a start, and I can give the horses some refreshment on the way!"

"Very well, then—drive to the corner of Edgware Road. When you get there, I'll tell you which way you are to take."

George gave this direction because at the moment he had not made up his mind where to go.

That it would be best to get a little way from London seemed tolerably clear, and therefore, he gave instructions to be driven to the corner of the Edgware Road.

No. 120.—BLUESKIN.

While he was going so far he should be able to mature his plans.

Now that he had his captive fairly in the vehicle, he removed his hand from her face, and allowed her to sit on the seat opposite to him.

He kept an eye upon all her movements, but he saw that, although she was not utterly unconscious, she was, nevertheless, in a dreamy state, and unable to make any resistance.

Anxiously he began to deliberate.

"I will get into some out-of-the-way place, some miles from London, and there I will take steps for an immediate marriage! When the ceremony is once performed I shall not care—she can go to the devil if she likes—my share of the wealth will be secure!"

Presently the coach stopped, and looking out of the window, George saw that he was at the corner of the Edgware Road.

"Drive straight on towards Edgware," said George.

"Very good, sir," said the driver; "and if you don't mind the expense, there is an inn at Kilburn where I can obtain a change of horses."

"D—n the expense!" said George Wild. "Drive there as fast as you can, and change the two brutes you've got for the two best horses in the stable!"

"All right, sir!" said the driver. "But you'll understand that this will be extra!"

"Oh, quite extra!" said George, growling. "You will have no cause to complain of my liberality when we get to the end of our journey."

The coachman drove on, and, without the occurrence of any further accident, finally stopped in front of an inn at Kilburn.

Edgworth Bess had not yet recovered her consciousness.

She knew that the coach had stopped—she knew that people were moving about, but yet she lacked both the physical and mental power to utter a cry that would bring them to her relief.

The horses were quickly changed, and when the driver had solaced himself with a glass of something short to keep the cold out, the journey was resumed at a much more rapid rate than before.

Just as day was beginning to dawn they passed through the little village of Edgware.

George knew the place well—in fact, he was familiar with all the roads in and around London.

While thinking seriously as to the spot he should choose for his destination, he suddenly remembered a very out-of-the-way nook, where there was every probability of his being able to remain for any length of time in secrecy and security.

This place was, however, some five miles further along the road, and so he leaned back in his seat, waiting patiently until that distance had been travelled.

CHAPTER DLXII.

WILD JUNIOR ARRIVES WITH HIS CAPTIVE AT THE LONE-SOME INN.

THE hackney-coach rolled along at a very tolerable rate and in a short time its destination would be reached.

The place of which George Wild had thought was an inn, which did not stand at the side of the road, but up a narrow lane which seemed to lead to nowhere save to the front door of the building.

It was a place that had a very evil reputation indeed, and certainly no traveller would be safe if he ventured to take up his lodgings there for one night.

How it was he had not thought of it earlier George could scarcely tell, but the fact was, the recollection of the existence of the inn had altogether slipped out of his memory.

He congratulated himself, however, upon having thought of it just in time.

The landlord he had known well in times back, and he was aware that he was one who would not hesitate to commit any atrocity so long as he was well rewarded for what he did.

This was precisely the man George wanted, and moreover, he was certain that this man would not betray him nor allow Edgworth Bess a single opportunity of escape.

Then the inn itself was so retired, that it was but rarely people stopped at it, and from the fact that there was scarcely any business done, it might be gathered that the landlord had some other source of revenue.

George kept a good look-out all the way, to be in readiness to stop the driver when the coach reached the corner of the lane we have mentioned.

Edgworth Bess now began to recover to some extent from her alarm.

Still, she was greatly terrified, and trembled from head to foot.

The rapid motion of the vehicle, the silence and darkness around her, and above all, the harsh, forbidding countenance of the man who sat opposite to her filled her with a thousand dreadful apprehensions.

By degrees, however, she began to recover her calmness, and at the same time her courage also.

"George Wild," she said.

"You know me then it seems!" he interrupted with a

chuckle. "Well, so much the better, we shall be well acquainted with each other before long."

"No, we shall not!" she answered, with a shudder. "I demand to be released! Stop this vehicle and allow me to alight!"

"Wouldn't you like it?" said George, putting his tongue in his cheek. "But really the thing is quite absurd! I could not be so unkind as to leave you on a lonely country road at this hour of the night!"

"Don't mock me! I tell you I demand to be released!"

"Oh, do you?"

"I do!"

"Then, I regret to say that your request is one which I cannot comply with. I am very sorry, but—"

Edgworth Bess would not wait to hear any more.

Turning round, she tapped with her fingers upon the glass in front of the hackney-coach.

"Stop—stop!" she cried. "Stop at once!"

"Hulloa!" said the driver—"what's the matter I wonder?"

He pulled up, and the hackney-coach came to a standstill.

Wild junior uttered a fearful oath.

He seized Edgworth Bess by the wrist with such tightness that she shrieked out with pain.

"Drive on!" shouted George to the coachman. "If you dare to stop again without I order you to do so, I'll put a bullet through your d—d carcass! Drive on, will you?"

The coachman muttered some curses between his teeth, and whipped up his horses.

Once more the vehicle was in motion.

Finding herself foiled in this attempt to escape, and believing that the driver would disregard her commands, Edgworth Bess uttered shriek after shriek, in the hope that the sounds of distress would reach the ears of some chance passers by.

"Stop that noise!" growled Wild junior, threateningly—"stop it, I say, or it will be the worse for you!"

Edgworth Bess paid no attention.

"You had better not try me too far!" he said. "Don't force me to use violence towards you, or you will regret it! Silence, I say! You are in my power, and cannot escape!"

Exhausted and fatigued, the poor girl again sank back upon the seat.

"Now," said Wild junior, "as we have begun to have a little conversation, I think I can't do better than acquaint you with my future intentions! Do you hear me?"

Edgworth Bess was silent.

"You won't speak; but I know you can hear, and so I shall take silence for consent! Now listen: I am not afraid that you will escape from me this time; we are in a lonely part of the country, and there is no one near to aid you!"

At these words the poor girl could not control her tears. "It will be your own fault entirely if I use any harshness towards you," said Wild junior. "I have every wish to behave kindly; all will depend upon yourself, however. Of this, at least, you can make yourself certain—before you are many hours older you will be my wife!"

"Never—never!" said Edgworth Bess, with the utmost loathing. "You shall not force me into such a union!"

"Well, we shall see," said George, significantly. "I am determined; and as for you, it matters little what you say or do!"

"It is monstrous—horrible!" said Edgworth Bess. "And hopeless as my position now seems, I am not without hope that help will come ere long!"

"You think your friends will find you out, do you? You are mistaken though: I am not the least apprehensive upon that point! No, no—I have you secure!"

Edgworth Bess looked from side to side, and was strongly tempted to make a desperate effort to cast herself through the coach window even while the vehicle was in motion.

But had she made any such attempt it would have proved abortive.

With an eye like a hawk's, Wild junior watched not only every movement of her body but every change of her countenance.

"You were born to be my wife," he said; "you may

not think it, but you will find out presently that what I say is true! Hi—hi, driver—stop! Pull up, I say!"

Grumbling and swearing, the coachman stopped his horses.

"What now?" he said.

"Be civil," said George; "recollect I have got to settle with you yet!"

These words produced an effect upon the coachman, for in quite a humble tone of voice he said:

"Which way do you want to go now, sir?"

"Why, you have just come past a narrow lane—turn back, and drive up it!"

"Very good, sir."

"You will find it will lead you to a public-house—stop before the front door."

The coachman said no more, but turned his horses' heads round and obeyed Wild junior's command.

When Edgworth Bess found they were going to stop, and at a roadside inn, too—for such she imagined it would be—her heart once more beat with hope.

Surely in this place she would meet with people.

They would be human.

They would listen to the story of her sufferings.

They would protect her from George Wild.

As might be guessed, this hope was destined to be a fallacious one.

Slowly and heavily the hackney-coach made its way along the narrow lane.

It was ill-kept, and deep ruts had been worn in it, and the horses struggled at every step to get the vehicle along.

The public-house was situated about a quarter of a mile up this lane, and at last, to the satisfaction and relief of all parties, the hackney-coach stopped before the front door.

Edgworth Bess opened her lips as though about to scream.

George Wild divined her intention, and, in a stern voice, he said:

"Now, I'll give you one word of caution, and mind you attend to it! If you don't, it will be the worse for you, and you will have no one to blame but yourself for the consequences! Be silent, and avoid making any fuss! The people at this place are all in my power! You will get no help from them; on the contrary, they will strive to assist me!"

Wild junior spoke these words in such suppressed and earnest tones, that they carried conviction to the heart of Edgworth Bess.

She did not for one single moment doubt that he was doing otherwise than speaking the truth.

A deep groan of utter anguish and hopelessness escaped her lips, and again she sank back half-fainting on the seat.

The coach came to a standstill.

The driver got down off his seat, and, coming to the door, turned the handle, and opened it.

"Here we are, sir!" he said. "This is the inn, I suppose? Do you want to alight?"

"Yes," said George. "I sha'n't travel any further for some hours! Come," he added, addressing his prisoner, "no resistance—no screams, or depend upon it you will repent it!"

Grasping her wrist tightly as he spoke, he half dragged her out of the coach.

The ostler was standing by, and he gazed with some surprise upon Wild junior's proceedings.

Taking no notice, however, George dragged his prisoner after him to the front door of the public-house, which was standing wide open.

He had only a few steps to go; and almost before she was aware of it, Edgworth Bess found herself standing in a narrow, ill-lighted passage.

"Nicholson," cried Wild, as soon as he crossed the threshold—"Nicholson, I say, where are you?"

"Ere—ere!" said a gruff voice.

Directly afterwards there was a flash of light at the other end of the passage.

George took hold of the front door and slammed it shut, and then dragged his captive still further along the passage.

"Hallo!" cried the voice—"what the devil are you about? What did you want to shut that door for?"

"Nicholson," said George again, "come this way!"

A man, carrying a light, now advanced.

He stopped a few paces from his guests.

He held the light up in the air above his head, in order to catch a glimpse of their countenances.

In doing this he also revealed his own.

It was sinister-looking and repulsive to a degree.

As soon as ever he caught sight of Wild junior's face, Nicholson started violently.

When he recovered himself, a remarkable change in his manner was observable.

He bent himself almost to the ground, and in the most humble tones which could possibly be employed by anyone, he said:

"I am your very humble and most devoted servant! What is it you want? I'll do anything for you if you'll but spare my life!"

"I'll see about that," said George, gravely; "I will promise nothing. Still, there is a chance now, if you like to embrace it, of making friends with me."

"Speak—speak!" said Nicholson, anxiously. "Let me know what it is!"

"Well, then, first of all, have you a strong room upstairs?"

"You know I have," replied Nicholson. "You know that as well as I do. Of course, the room is there just as it was when occupied by—"

"Silence!" shouted Wild junior, in a tone so loud that it made the whole house ring again—"silence! Mention no names! That will do. Show me the way to that room!"

"Certainly—certainly," said Nicholson, as humbly as before. "You know the way. Follow me; I'll go first with the light."

George growled out a reply, and followed in the footsteps of the man Nicholson.

He went some little distance further along the passage until he came to the bottom of a flight of stairs.

These he ascended.

They were old and worm-eaten, and creaked painfully beneath their tread, threatening every moment to give way and precipitate them to the earth.

The top was reached in safety, and then Nicholson crossed a landing and paused before a low, strong-looking door.

CHAPTER DLXIII.

WILD JUNIOR TAKES NICHOLSON INTO HIS CONFIDENCE, AND OBTAINS A SPECIAL LICENCE.

A KEY was sticking in the lock.

It was a large, rusty key, and seemed to have been for a long while unused, for Nicholson had to put forth considerable strength before he could turn it.

With a grating, screeching sound, the bolt of the lock was drawn back.

Then a vigorous push caused the door to open, for from damp or some other cause it stuck tightly in its frame.

Nicholson entered the room first, and Wild junior followed.

Upon the countenance of the latter there was a strange peculiar expression.

Something had agitated him in no trifling degree.

What that something was we may yet learn.

"She will be safe here—quite safe!" said Nicholson.

"Of course, you remember—"

"Silence, fool!" interrupted George, fiercely. "Why revert to the past? I wish to hear nothing of it! Close the door, and hold the light so that I can look round!"

Humbly, Nicholson obeyed.

When he held up the light, Wild junior glanced searchingly around him.

The room was empty, and had a desolate appearance.

It contained only two articles of furniture—a small table and a small bed, though the last scarcely deserved to have such a name applied to it.

"This will do," said George.

Then turning to Edgworth Bess, who was shivering with cold and fright, he added:

"You will stay here only for a short time. You will be safe."

"Quite safe," said Nicholson—"I'll guarantee that!"

"There's the window," said Wild—"how about that?"

"It's all right."

"In what way is it secured?"

"It's fastened, and there are bars outside. The ground is twelve feet below, and my dog Pincher is in the yard."

"That will do," said George—"that is quite satisfactory. Now, come, close the door!"

Hearing these words, Edgworth Bess made a frantic attempt to leave the chamber before the closing door made her a prisoner.

But George Wild thrust her rudely back, and turned the rusty key in the lock.

"Downstairs!" he said, imperiously, addressing Nicholson.

"Lead the way to the best room!"

"Oh, yes—certainly! Oh, yes! In all things I am your most obedient servant!"

Now, there was something intensely disagreeable in the cringing servility of this man.

It is clear that it was not his nature to fawn upon anyone as he did upon Wild junior.

But there was good reason for his behaviour.

He led the way to a miserable apartment on the ground floor, which he assured his visitor was the best in the house.

"Something to drink!" said George. "Come here, and bring a glass for yourself—I want to speak to you!"

"Yes, yes—oh, yes! What is it you would like?"

"Have you any wine?"

"Not such as I should like to put before you."

"Any brandy?"

"Yes."

"Bring that, then."

Nicholson soon returned with a bottle of brandy, and George poured out two glasses.

"Shall you want that room upstairs very long?" asked Nicholson.

"No; for a short time only—a day or two, at most."

"Very good!"

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, for no particular reason—I wished to know!"

"Nicholson," said Wild, sinking his voice, "listen attentively to what I am going to say!"

"I always do—always."

"Be doubly attentive now. You know the power that I have over you? You quite comprehend that, without my going further into particulars?"

"Quite—quite! Don't say any more—the subject is hateful!"

"Very good; and knowing that you are so much in my power, I don't hesitate to take you into my confidence."

Nicholson muttered some half intelligible reply.

"I am going to get married," said Wild junior.

"You?"

"Yes."

"In earnest?"

"Certainly."

"To that girl upstairs?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know that you were a marrying man," said Nicholson.

"Nor am I—that is, I wouldn't marry a woman."

"Not a woman?"

"No."

"Then what do you call that person upstairs?"

"A fortune, Nicholson—a fortune! That's what I'm going to marry!"

"I see!" said the landlord. "I was dull not to understand earlier."

"I am resolved to wed her," said George; "but she will never give her consent!"

"How shall you manage it, then?"

"That's just what I wanted to consult with you about."

"You honour me," said Nicholson, bending his head—"you honour me by taking me so deeply into your confidence."

"Bah! I should not do it did I not know well enough that you dare not disclose a word I say, or refuse to obey my mandates!"

"I will be silent and obedient!"

"Good! Well, now, let us consider how I am to succeed in my design. In the first place, a special licence will be required."

Nicholson nodded.

"That's but a trifling difficulty—I can easily surmount that!"

"Not so easy, I should think," said Nicholson.

"Yes; leave me to obtain the licence! I wish the remainder was no more difficult!"

"But the girl's consent?"

"Yes, that's the obstacle!"

"I can't see how you are to overcome it."

"Nor I, except in one way."

"Is there one way?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"To drug her—make her half insensible and half conscious of what she is about! In that case it will be necessary to secure the services of a parson who would overlook such a trifling irregularity as the bride not knowing what she was about."

Nicholson laughed.

"You have a rare wit!" he exclaimed; "the idea of calling such a thing a trifle!"

"Well, no matter. Supposing that we settle to overcome her resistance by stupefying her, it then becomes necessary to find a parson. Can you procure one?"

Nicholson shook his head.

"My acquaintances don't lie among such people. I don't trouble parsons much."

"Nor I," said Wild junior, grinding his teeth; "but I wish I had one as much in my power as you are, the whole thing would be easy then!"

"But you have not."

"No, curse it, I wish I had!"

"I don't know how it is to be managed," said Nicholson.

"But it must be done," cried Wild, "whether it can or not! You must find me a parson who will perform this ceremony remember. I'll pay him well for the service—indeed, he shall have such a reward as will entirely overcome all conscientious scruples!"

"I'll try, Mr. Wild—I'll try!"

"And you must succeed! Offer any amount, no matter what, so long as the object is achieved!"

"To what amount would you go?"

"To any amount."

"A thousand pounds?"

"Yes, or two, or three! No matter how much, if it cannot be done for less!"

"That will be a great temptation," said Nicholson. "I have better hopes now."

"Well, now, then, listen. I have a few instructions to give you, and, if you are wise, you will ponder well upon them."

"Speak—I am all attention."

"Well, then, in the first place, I am going to leave this house for a time."

"Why?"

"In order to obtain a special licence. I must ride to London for it."

"I see now. I forgot that."

"It will take me several hours," continued George, "and while I am gone, bear in mind I leave that girl upstairs in your charge."

"She will be quite safe."

"She had better be, for your own sake! I shall hold you responsible for her. If she escapes, or if she is rescued, the blame will rest upon your shoulders."

"Don't be alarmed upon that point," said Nicholson.

"I'm not afraid of either happening. She's perfectly safe—as safe as—"

"You need not mention names. Curse it! why do you keep harping all the time upon the past?"

"Pray forgive me, Mr. Wild! I meant nothing. It was done thoughtlessly—quite thoughtlessly."

"Well, recollect for the future. Have you a horse in the stable that you can place at my disposal?"

"No, that I have not."

"You must get one."

"That will take some time. I shall have to go far in order to obtain what you require. But there's the hackney-coachman—why not return with him?"

"Has he not gone?"

"Well, hardly, considering you have not settled with him for the journey here."

"Very true. I remember now that, in the excitement I felt, I forgot it. I'll go back with him. That will suit admirably."

"Shall I tell him so now?"

"Yes, at once. Where is he?"

"In the kitchen, having something to drink."
"Well, tell him to get ready. I shall ride back to London with him."

The driver was communicated with, and, in a short time after, George Wild was again seated in the vehicle, and on his way back to London.

As the distance from the lonely inn increased, strange misgivings came over him as to the security of his captive.

But he would banish these doubts by the thought that the landlord was so completely in his power that, for his life's sake, he would guard her securely.

A man less audacious than Wild junior might have hesitated before he attempted to obtain a special marriage licence.

But, for one thing, he understood exactly how to make his application.

He studied the matter carefully over in his mind during his ride.

By the time he reached London, day had begun, and the streets presented their usual bustling appearance.

George dismissed the hackney-coach close to St. Paul's.

He gave the driver such a liberal sum that the man was actually quite satisfied with his night's work, which is something wonderful, considering that the hackney-coachmen of the last century greatly resembled the cabmen of the present day.

George watched the vehicle lumber off, and then he made his way to Doctors' Commons.

The obtaining of the licence involved his taking an oath to something which he knew quite well was false.

But it was scarcely likely that such a one as George Wild would shrink from a trifle like that.

He was quite delighted with the ease with which he obtained the much-coveted document, and went out into the street again, feeling quite overjoyed.

"Now to return to Nicholson!" he exclaimed. "I can't help feeling uneasy; but that's because there's so much at stake. I'll make haste back, and I'll have a horse—that will be the quickest and best way!"

George hired a horse, and was soon making his way towards his destination at full gallop.

The journey was performed in much less time than had been taken by the hackney-coach.

At length he pulled up opposite the strange, lonely, out-of-the-way inn.

His horse was covered with foam, and panting painfully for breath.

Quite heedless of this, however, George sprang from the saddle and entered the inn.

CHAPTER DLXIV.

JONATHAN WILD RESOLVES TO SHOW THE CONTEMPT HE FEELS FOR THE OLD HAG'S PREDICTIONS.

THE encounter with the witch-like and seemingly supernatural being at the toll-gate produced, as we have seen, a remarkable effect upon Jonathan Wild.

He was more terrified and alarmed than he would have admitted even to himself.

It was an exquisite relief when he found he was leaving the hateful spot behind him so rapidly.

As the distance increased, his alarm slightly subsided, and he began to feel angry with himself for having allowed his fears to get so completely the mastery over him.

Although Mr. Noakes had not been included in the witch's denunciations, yet he was to the full as terrified as his companion.

Wild noticed his terror, and felt disgusted with it.

As well as he could, he banished all his own fears, and turning round to his companion, said fiercely:

"What are you looking so damnably frightened about?"

Mr. Noakes did not reply.

"Answer me!" cried Wild. "Do you mean to say that you attach the least importance to the ravings of that mad creature?"

"It is not for me to say," said Noakes. "You set me the example of galloping away, and I did but follow."

"Well," said Jonathan, "I hate mad people—I can't bear to be near them."

"Was she mad?"

"Of course she was, idiot! If she was in her senses,

do you think she would have behaved in that extraordinary manner?"

"I suppose not."

"Of course not! You might think I cared for her ravings, and fancy I was terrified? Nothing of the kind! You never made a greater mistake in your life!"

Mr. Noakes did not like to contradict his companion, for fear of arousing his resentment.

Nevertheless, he considered it was necessary to say something.

"What old woman is it?" he asked—"who is she?"

"How should I know?"

"I thought you did."

"Then you thought wrong."

"But she said that she had met you before, and that she had prophesied your ultimate fate."

"Peace!" shrieked Wild, fiercely. "Say no more about it!"

The thought that some day or other he might expiate his many crimes upon the scaffold was one that filled him with the liveliest horror.

He could not bear to look forward to suffering, in his own person, that death to which he had condemned so many innocent persons.

But, then, directly after he had spoken he fancied he was strengthening the belief in the mind of his companion that he was really and truly alarmed at what the old woman had said.

"She is some mad creature," he continued, "who ought not to be allowed to be at large! I only hope that bullet was effectual!"

"What! would you murder the poor old creature?"

"Yes!" said Wild, savagely—"I should like to see her die a death of cruel torment!"

"But suppose, Mr. Wild, that in what she said there should be some truth?"

"How do you mean, villain!"

"I mean, supposing that what she has said is a warning as to what the future will be?"

"Do you think I would pay attention to the ravings of a maniac?"

"There may be truth in them," said Mr. Noakes. "Why not take warning by them?—why not take steps to leave England at once, and place yourself in a position of security?"

"Bah!" was the reply. "I would not display so much rank cowardice! I tell you, I care not for her words!"

"But you do care, Jonathan Wild!" said Mr. Noakes, with a boldness that surprised even himself.

"Liar! I tell you I do not!" said Wild, in tones of bravado. "And to prove it, I'll stop the next traveller I meet with on the highway!"

"No, no! That would be madness—utter madness!"

"Would it?" said Jonathan. "I rather think it would be something quite different! However, you will see. And you will see, as well, how much effect the croakings of that old hag have had upon me!"

"Of course you can act as you like," said Mr. Noakes, with a sigh, "and I am obliged to submit. I wish you would consent to a separation, and allow me to go my way, and you to go yours."

"You would like it, would you not?" exclaimed Jonathan, with a sneer. "No, no—we never part again, until we are separated by the officers!"

"And that will not be long first," said Mr. Noakes, "if you continue in your present mad career."

"Whether it is long or not, I shall keep you with me. For one thing, I hate to be alone—I can't bear it; but, independently of that, I should not think of trusting you out of my sight."

"Why not?"

"For fear you should take advantage of the opportunity to betray me to my foes."

"That is a groundless fear."

"Well, perhaps it is," said Jonathan. "As I don't intend to run the risk of allowing you to leave me, you see you will not have the opportunity."

Noakes groaned.

"I tell you candidly," said Wild, "and I hope that the intelligence will be pleasing, that I intend, ere long, to quit England for ever."

"Do you indeed?"

"I do. I am as sick of being hunted like a wild beast as you are!"

"Then why not go at once?"

"Because I have an object to achieve—I have a purpose to accomplish; and, until it is done, I must stay here."

Mr. Noakes groaned.

"What are you making that noise for, you fool? You hear what I say—whether you like it or not, you will have to stay with me; and you shall have such a sum of money as will enable you to live decently in some foreign land during the remainder of your life."

"Are you in earnest?" said the Governor, endeavouring to catch a glimpse of his companion's countenance.

"You shall see," said Wild.

The thief-taker carefully turned his head away.

He did not wish his companion to note the hideous, mocking expression upon it.

One glance at his features would have been enough to let the Governor know that Wild was not sincere in what he said.

"You shall see," continued Jonathan, "how much effect that old woman's words have had upon me. Do you think I would be frightened by such a shadow? No! Pull up a moment, and listen! I wish to know whether there's anyone on the road."

"Mr. Wild," said Noakes, imploringly, "do for once take my advice! If there is a traveller, let him pass by unmolested. Let us get further away from our foes. You forget, surely, that the officers are somewhere behind, and after discovering the body in the lane they would pursue us with fresh vigour and determination."

"We are already out of hearing of them, and I don't feel alarmed on that score. But silence! I intend to prove to you that I care not one jot for that old hag's remarks!"

While speaking in this manner, Jonathan Wild was, as the reader may suppose, endeavouring to cheat himself into the belief that he did not indeed attach any importance the old witch's prophecies.

But his very manner was quite enough to show that he was indeed much affected by them.

Still he was in hopes of being able to remove the impression by an assumption of bravado and recklessness which he was far from feeling.

Therefore, it was not to convince his timid companion that he despised the denunciations that had been levelled at him that he resolved to stop the next traveller he saw, but to inspire his own craven heart with fresh courage.

Noakes pulled up, for he did not dare to refuse obedience to Wild's commands.

Both remained quite still and quite quiet, listening with the greatest intendment, but both with different hopes.

Jonathan Wild was wishing ardently for the sound of hoof-beats on the hard road.

Mr. Noakes, on the contrary, was hoping that the silence would remain unbroken, and that Wild would consent to place a still greater distance between them and their foes than there was, without committing an act which would serve to place the officers unerringly upon their track.

"I hear no one as yet," said Wild, after several moments' silence. "All is still. We will push on a little further."

Mr. Noakes was overjoyed.

"But I have not abandoned my intention. I tell you, the next traveller I meet I'll stop! Morning is coming, but if it is broad daylight I'll do it!"

At a swift yet easy trot, the two villains made their way along the road in the direction of the country.

Ere they had gone much further, however, the sound which Jonathan so much wished for reached his ears.

"A traveller," he said, "and only one. Now, then, I will prove how I despise her words! Jonathan Wild will never die upon the gallows!"

"I don't know that," said Noakes.

"What do you say, villain?"

"I meant that it was hard indeed for anyone to say what particular death should overtake them. Fortune might take an evil turn. You might be brought to Tyburn."

"Silence, wretch! I will not have such a thing mentioned! But now I tell you, even if my enemies triumph, they shall not receive that satisfaction in the end!"

"How could you prevent it if you were captured, and strict watch was kept over you?"

"Why, rather than they should put a rope round my neck, I would batter my brains out against the wall of my cell! But hush!—not another word! The traveller is coming now!"

"Take my advice, and let him pass!"

"Never! You are a coward and a fool! Back your horse into the shadow of the hedgerow, and remain there until the deed is over! Besides, I want more money than I have now!"

Mr. Noakes backed his horse quite into the ditch by the roadside, while Jonathan Wild took up his position boldly and defiantly in the centre of the highway.

In his hand he held a pistol, which he had satisfied himself, by a rapid examination, was in perfect readiness for use.

The horseman, whose approach could now be distinctly heard, was coming from the direction of London.

The night was dark, and so he did not see the motionless figures of Wild and his steed, planted in the centre of the road, until close to them.

Indeed, almost the first intimation that the traveller received was the sound of Jonathan Wild's voice.

"Hold!" he cried. "Pull up, for your life! Hand over your money! Don't dally, or play any tricks, or you will find it the worse for you!"

The traveller stopped his horse, and with great suddenness drew a pistol from the holster, and levelling it at Wild, pulled the trigger.

There was a flash and a deafening report.

Jonathan uttered a scream of pain.

"Ha, ha!" said the traveller, "you have got your deserts at last, my fine fellow! I hope you like it!"

A horrible curse came from Wild's lips; and then, hastily raising the pistol, he fired.

The shot was effectual.

The traveller had set his horse in motion, and the bullet from Wild's pistol must have struck him in the back.

He uttered a gasping shriek, as though enduring great agony, and fell forward in a strange attitude upon his horse's neck.

His steed, terrified by the report of the firearms and the strange attitude of his rider, galloped off at full speed, and in a few seconds was out of sight.

Jonathan Wild swayed backwards and forwards in the saddle, and seemed in imminent danger of falling to the ground.

Then Mr. Noakes ventured to come out from his place of concealment.

"Are you much hurt?" he asked.

"Curse him, I know not!—he has hit me!"

"I feared as much."

"The bullet has struck me in the neck! Where is the rascal? Did he fall from his horse?"

"No, he galloped off."

"After him, then! I'll pursue him! I'll have his money yet! I'm sure I hit him!"

"But you are scarcely fit to ride!"

"Yes, I am! Wait a moment. There, that will do—the bleeding will stop now."

While speaking these words, Jonathan hastily tore off his neckcloth and bound it very tightly over the wound—so tight, indeed, and with so much skill, as to check the flow of blood at once.

Whether it would only last for a time, or whether the stoppage would be permanent, he could not tell.

"Now then," he said, "I'm ready and equal to the task. Forward—forward! I say, we will have him yet!"

"Take my advice!" said Mr. Noakes. "Listen to me!"

"Coward and fool!" cried Wild. "I didn't ask you to run the risk! Come on—follow me. Refuse at your peril!"

Mr. Noakes knew he dared not refuse, and so, clapping spurs to his horse's sides, he followed Jonathan Wild at a headlong gallop along the highway.

CHAPTER DLXV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES FIND THEMSELVES UPON THE THRESHOLD OF A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

Ere they had gone very far, a dreadful feeling of giddiness seized upon Jonathan Wild, and he absolutely reeled in the saddle.

It was in vain that he tried to overcome this sensation. The effects of the wound he had received would make

themselves apparent, and at last he had the prudence and good sense to rein-in his steed.

Mr. Noakes was nothing loth to follow his example.

"What now?" he said.

"Noakes—Noakes!" gasped Wild, faintly.

"What?"

"I'm afraid I've been hurt more than I thought, or I must stop—I can't ride any further."

"What shall you do?"

"I can scarcely tell; but now that the motion has ceased, I already begin to feel better."

This was only natural.

The violent exertion so quickly after having received the wound was enough to bleed him to death, and would have done so had he not stopped in time.

Now that his heart no longer beat so rapidly, and the blood circulated more slowly through his veins, the bleeding became less violent, and the thief-taker was soon sensible of it.

"What shall you do?" asked Noakes again. "Tell me how I am to act, and I will obey you."

"I can scarcely tell. I fear I must rest somewhere, and have the wound attended to. Curses on him—curses on him!"

"It was your own fault."

"Silence! What is it to you? Look around you—can you see any habitation?"

"No, not from here."

"There is a mist—a mist of blood before my eyes," said Jonathan, "and yet, for all that, I fancy I can see the grey light of dawn creeping over the meadows."

"Yes, you're right," said Noakes—"the night is over, and day has begun."

"Curses on him, then, for having crippled me like this! What are we to do during the daylight?"

"I don't know how to answer that question. I have always left the direction of affairs to you."

"Well, I'm better—fast getting better. Do you see any water?"

Mr. Noakes raised himself up in the stirrups, and then said:

"I fancy I can see a large pond over the meadows yonder, but I don't know how we are to reach it."

"We must," said Jonathan. "I burn with thirst, and cold water will do more to stanch the flow of blood than anything else. I can manage to go forward if my horse goes at a walking pace; so lead the way towards the pool you speak of."

Mr. Noakes knew he had no resource but to submit.

Fortunately, the meadow nearest the high-road was bounded by posts and rails.

But these were old, and in very bad condition altogether.

By dismounting, Mr. Noakes was able to pull up one of the posts out of the ground and to remove the rails, leaving a space wide enough for the horses to pass through.

As soon as they were in the meadow, Jonathan said:

"Don't mount until you have restored the fence to its original condition,—we don't want to leave such a track as that behind us!"

Mr. Noakes managed this pretty well, and then, remounting his horse, led the way towards the pond.

It was about half a mile away from the high-road.

It was a large, smooth sheet of water; and from the manner in which the ground round about sloped down to it, it seemed to have been made for the purpose of draining the surrounding property.

Over this pool there hung a thin, gauzy mist, which was, nevertheless, sufficient to render objects confused and indistinct.

"There's little fear of our being seen from the high-road," said Noakes, as they halted at the side of the pond.

"So much the better," growled Wild. "Help me to dismount."

With some difficulty, he managed to lower himself from the saddle.

He was frightfully weak, and, but for his indomitable spirit, he must surely have succumbed beneath it.

Upon gaining the water, he completely plunged his head into it, and allowed the cold liquid to encircle his neck.

The cold water was very pleasant and refreshing.

His wound had begun to smart horribly, but the cold

water stopped it as if by magic, and all that remained was a slight, dull, aching pain.

The thief-taker drank some deep draughts of the water, and then felt considerably better.

His next act was to bandage his throat up in a more careful and skilful manner than he had done previously.

He employed wet bandages, which were much better than dry ones.

Still he was fearfully weak, and his head throbbed as though a heavy iron weight was beating to and fro inside his brain.

He sat down on the damp grass at the edge of the pool, looking very crestfallen and wretched indeed.

"Are you better now?" asked Noakes.

"Yes—much better."

"I am glad of that. Don't you think it will be wise to move away from this pool?"

"Why so?"

"Can you not see that the mist which was hanging over it has dispersed, and we must now be plainly visible to anyone who may be on the high-road?"

"You are right, Noakes. I don't feel equal to the exertion, but I must mount again. We must push on still further, and stop at the first place that offers us the least chance of shelter."

"I shall be glad of a rest," said Noakes, "if it's ever so brief a one. It seems to me as though I'd never known what rest was."

"Oh, gammon!" said Wild. "You have not suffered half so much as I have; but that's neither here nor there! Help me to mount!"

Mr. Noakes obeyed, and with a great deal of trouble, Jonathan Wild seated himself in the saddle.

His companion followed.

"Will you return to the high-road or push on across the meadows?" asked the latter.

"Across the meadows, of course."

Mr. Noakes said no more.

Presently they reached a slightly-elevated piece of ground, from which an extensive prospect was obtainable.

"I am very weak and giddy," said Wild, "and my eyes fail me! Look again—tell me whether you can see a habitation of any kind!"

"I can only see one."

"Can you see one?"

"Yes."

"How far off?"

"About a mile."

"What sort of a looking place is it? I can't see it."

Wild strained his eyes in vain.

There was a mist before them, and he could see nothing beyond his horse's head.

"It's a large, red-brick building," said Mr. Noakes—

"a gentleman's house, I should fancy, by the look of it."

"Then that's no place for us, I'm afraid."

"I fear not, too."

"And yet," said Wild, "people dwelling alone in the country in such houses as this are generally hospitable. Very often the place is left in charge of servants alone, and they are always glad to see a fresh face. But are you sure you can see no other habitation?"

"Quite sure, Mr. Wild, and I can see for miles in every direction."

"Then we must go there, at all risks."

This was an idea that rather terrified Mr. Noakes.

Still he moved onwards.

"What shall we say when we get there?" he said.

"Even if we do see the servants, I question whether they would be well enough pleased with our appearance to admit us."

"I don't know that," said Jonathan. "It would be easy to get up some tale. We will say that we have been robbed and ill-treated by highwaymen, and left for dead upon the road. Leave it to me—I'll make up a story that shall sound plausible and satisfactory, depend upon it!"

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Wild! I have often made the remark, and it's quite true."

"There's nothing very wonderful in that," said Jonathan, grinning. "Are we going straight for the house?"

"Yes—as straight as I can take you. Do you feel any better?"

"I fancy I do, a little. Still, my eyes are very bad. All objects seem floating about."

After this Jonathan became silent, and from the look of

his face, it might be surmised that he was engaged in arranging the details of some story which he would be able to pour into the ears of the residents of the red-brick house.

He was pleased to find, after a time, that his vision improved, for he was able to distinguish the outlines of the building.

It was a large, imposing-looking building, and quite a different place to what he had pictured in his own mind from his companion's description.

He was astonished at the vastness of it; but there was a general air of untidiness about the whole structure.

At some windows the blinds were drawn closely down, and the others had the shutters shut.

"We are in luck's way, Noakes," said Wild at last. "I feel well-nigh certain that the owners of that mansion are not occupying it. The place has all the appearance of being left in charge of servants."

"It looks dirty and wretched enough, certainly."

"It does."

In a few more minutes they came to a red-brick wall, which seemed completely to surround the piece of ground upon which the house was built.

This wall was eight feet high at the very least, and of great thickness, so that it was quite out of the question to think of climbing over it.

"We must go round to one of the regular entrances," said Wild,—"it will look much better, and be more in accordance with the tale I have to tell. Come along. If we skirt the wall in this direction, I think we shall surely find a gate."

Wild was right in this conjecture.

Before they had gone another hundred yards they turned a corner, and then another hundred yards brought them to some large and handsome wooden gates.

"I see how it is, now," exclaimed Wild at this moment. "The dirty appearance of the house is quite accounted for. Why, it's to let!"

He pointed as he spoke to a board that was nailed on the gate, which made the announcement that the house was to let, and the particulars were to be obtained within.

"Then the house is not empty, at all events," said Wild, after reading the announcement from beginning to end. "Perhaps a couple have been left in charge of it. Well, that don't matter. I know what sort of people they are generally who mind houses in that sort of way—the sight of a guinea will persuade them to do almost anything."

So saying, Jonathan Wild seized hold of a handle which hung down at one side of the gate.

The loud clanging of a bell then made itself heard.

They waited for several minutes, but there was no response.

"Perhaps there is no one here after all," said Mr. Noakes.

"I'll warrant there is," said Jonathan, "or else that board would not be there. Ring the bell again—you can pull the handle better than I can."

Noakes tugged away with right good will, for he believed that at last there was a prospect of his obtaining rest and secure shelter.

But no more notice was taken of this pull than of the former one; but Wild, still clinging to his original notion, ordered Noakes to ring again.

The third time, a little wicket in the large gates was opened, and an old and wrinkled face appeared at the aperture.

Simultaneously with its appearance, a voice said, in shrill, piping tones:

"Want to see the house, I suppose? Seen the board to say it's to let. You can come in and look at it, if you like; but dear me, you may as well take my word, and save yourself the trouble. The house won't suit you—I'm sure of it. If it hadn't been so damp and so old, and if it hadn't been haunted, it would have been let long ago. However, you can come in and have a look, if you like."

CHAPTER DLXVI.

SOME VERY EXTRAORDINARY EVENTS TAKE PLACE IN THE HOUSE TO LET.

THIS was a most extraordinary speech for the old woman to make.

Jonathan Wild looked at her in amazement.

"Well, you can come in and look at the place, or will

you save yourself the trouble?" continued the old woman, speaking with the same volubility as before. "It's quite indifferent to me which, seein' as 'ow I'm placed 'ere in charge; but I happen to 'ave a conscience, sir—a real conscience, and that's why I can't 'elp speakin' the truth."

Some curses rose up to Jonathan Wild's lips, but he thought his wisest plan would be not to utter them, and so, instead, he remarked:

"My good woman, I don't want to look at this house with the view of becoming its tenant, but the fact is we have both been set upon by a whole troop of highwaymen, and I have been wounded in the way you see."

"What's that to do with me?" almost shrieked the old woman. "You ought to be ashamed to fetch me hout of the 'ouse down to the gate, if you don't want to look hat the 'ouse—that's what you bought!"

She slammed the little wicket shut as she spoke.

"Pull the bell, Noakes!" roared Wild. "D—n you, pull it harder! How I wish I could have the pleasure of twisting that old hag's head off!"

Mr. Noakes pulled away at the bell-handle with might and main, and the clangour it made was something terrific.

The little wicket was dashed violently open, and the woman's face again appeared at it.

It was crimsoned and distorted by rage, but Jonathan Wild was better prepared than on the preceding occasion.

He had taken a guinea from his pocket, and held it up between his finger and thumb in such a manner that it could not escape the observation of the old woman.

Indeed, her eyes seemed to be attracted to the glittering piece of metal—as steel is attracted to the magnet—and there they remained, fixed and immovable.

"Do you want to earn a guinea?" cried Wild—"a guinea, look!—a real, golden guinea! Do you want to earn it?—if so, say the word!"

"A prince—a prince!" cried the old woman; "you must be a prince!"

"It don't matter who I am; but I have been badly hurt, and I want your assistance. Let me have a few hours' rest, and you shall have something more than this—I will give you a guinea for admitting us!"

"And you're sure you don't want the 'ouse?" asked the old woman.

"Quite sure."

"Then I'll let you hin, with hall the pleasure in life."

The face was withdrawn, and the sound of the drawing back of bolts and the removal of chains came immediately upon the ears of Wild and Noakes.

Then one half of the ponderous gates was thrown open.

"This way, gentlemen—this way, hit you please. When you're inside, I'll shut the gate again."

Mr. Noakes was still standing on the ground, holding his horse's bridle in his left hand.

With his right he now led Jonathan Wild's horse as well through the gate, which was immediately closed.

Both marvelled at the extraordinary behaviour of the old woman, and at her secrecy and caution.

She evidently did not desire that any persons should intrude upon the domain.

Feeling curious in this respect made Jonathan Wild pass his hand over his eyes to clear his vision a little, in order that he might see what the old woman looked like.

A closer view showed that she was not anything like so old as they had at first imagined; but her countenance was covered with innumerable lines and wrinkles, and her mouth and eyes were strangely puckered up.

She was nothing but a mere framework of bones, for there did not appear to be an ounce of flesh upon her whole body.

Her arms and hands especially were skeleton-like in a remarkable degree.

There was clearly nothing but bone and very little muscle.

The skin was drawn tightly over them—so tightly that it had a shiny look like bone itself.

"This way," she cried, hobbling before them, and looking like some evil spirit—"this way! Ah, this house has been to let for a long, long while, and I don't wonder at it, for who would live in it? No one with sense, I'm sure!"

"I don't wonder at it having remained so long empty," said Wild, to himself, "for who would take it after such a recommendation?"



[EDGORTH BESS MAKING HER ESCAPE FROM THE LONESOME INN.]

It seemed very strange that the old woman should endeavour to prejudice the minds of those persons who might happen to come to the gate to make inquiries about the house to let.

What her motive could be for such conduct was a matter of conjecture.

It might be that she found living there comfortable and pleasant, and did not wish to be turned out, as she would be should anyone decide to occupy the mansion.

This was the first view that Jonathan Wild took of the case, but before he had thought over it a moment, he came to the conclusion that it was not the right solution for the mystery.

If such an answer was often given to applicants, and if pains were taken by this old woman to set their minds against taking it, such conduct would inevitably sooner or later reach the ears of her employers.

Then she would, of course, be turned out immediately.

No 121.—BLUESKIN

Jonathan was not of the opinion that she had managed to impose upon people for such a short time as not to be found out, for as he glanced around him, not only at the house itself, but the grounds surrounding it, he could perceive every token that the place had been deserted for a great many years.

These were the thoughts and speculations passing through Jonathan's mind as he followed the old hag up the winding avenue, and round to the back part of the mansion.

It was strange, considering the state he was in both mentally and physically, that he should trouble himself about that which clearly did not concern him—it was no business of his whatever.

He had no intentions of occupying the house, and what could it signify to him, whether the old woman spoke against it or not.

One would have thought, with so many cares weighing

upon his mind, and with so many perplexing things to think about, that he would have passed over such a circumstance without taking any notice of it.

But Wild felt there was a mystery, and when he was conscious of this, the irresistible desire immediately sprang up in his mind to find out what that mystery was.

There did not seem the slightest probability that even if he did succeed in finding out the mystery, that it would benefit him in the remotest degree.

But he did not think of that.

"I will find it out," he muttered. "If it will do nothing else, it will serve to prevent me from brooding over unpleasant subjects—it will amuse me while I am here,—perhaps it will enable me to get that old hag into my power, and if so—Well, we'll see—we'll see!"

Jonathan muttered these last words just as they paused at the back of the premises.

"This way, gentlemen," said the hag. "You see, me and my old man, we live in the kitchens. It's a long time since we had visitors, I can assure you."

She chuckled oddly as she spoke.

Not without some trouble Jonathan dismounted from his steed.

But every moment he was palpably getting better; and there could be no question that, after he had partaken of a good meal, and had a few hours' rest, he would be once more equal to the difficulties of his position.

The dimness had almost left his eyes now; yet, for the last time, he passed his hands over them, pressing his fingers tightly upon his eyeballs.

Then, addressing the old woman, he said:

"So this house has been to let for a long time, I suppose?"

"Well, sir, it has—it has; and that's the truth—a very long while; but who can wonder at it?"

"It seems strange, too," remarked Wild, "that so fine a building and such beautiful grounds should be allowed to run to decay."

"But it is no wonder—it is no wonder," said the old hag, peering into his face, and speaking as though she wished to remove all suspicion from his mind. "You don't know the place, sir; but I'll show you over it, if you don't mind the trouble, when you're better. You see, it's very old and full of nooks and corners, and cupboards; and many years ago—so I've heard—there was a horrible murder committed in one of the rooms upstairs, and the whole place has been haunted ever since."

"What shall I do with the horses?" asked Noakes at this moment, for he was anxious to get inside, and wondered why Wild stopped talking about matters that could not possibly concern him.

"Horses?" said the hag. "I don't know what you can do with them. There's some stables belonging to the house!"

"Where are they?" asked Noakes, looking round.

"Oh! it's no good you thinkin' of putting the horses in them," said the hag, quickly—"for the roof is partly off, and they're filled up with litter, and wet, and the doors have not been opened for I couldn't tell how many years."

"Dear me—how odd!" said Jonathan.

The woman turned quickly round upon him as he spoke.

The expression of her face was such that Wild came to the conclusion that she regretted exceedingly having allowed the two strangers to enter the place.

"But what am I to do with the horses?" asked Noakes. "They must be put somewhere."

"And then there's no food for them," said the hag. "It's not likely that you'd find corn and hay and all that sort of thing in a house to let. You'd better tie them to the palisades."

"Judging from appearances," exclaimed Wild, glancing around him, "I imagine that they could not do much harm if they were left loose to roam over the ground, and then they would doubtless find something to eat."

"They can't do harm," said the old woman; "you can leave them loose if you like."

"Thank you. You will find you will lose nothing by being civil. Noakes," he added, turning to his companion, "take the bits out of their mouths, and let them wander about."

Noakes obeyed immediately.

The horses seemed glad enough to recover their free-

dom, and although the ground was overgrown with very rank vegetation, yet they quickly found something that suited their palates.

This little conversation had taken place in front of a weatherbeaten door which the old hag now proceeded to open.

It grated harshly upon its hinges, and a strange sensation came over the hearts both of Jonathan and Mr. Noakes as they followed their strange conductor into the darkness beyond.

"Stand still a moment," she cried, as soon as they crossed the threshold. "I want to close the door."

She passed by them as she spoke, and from the ease with which she closed the door, although the place was in utter darkness, Wild felt certain that she must be very familiar with it indeed.

She passed them again, saying:

"Follow me along the passage until I speak—it's level, but we shall come to steps presently, and then I will speak."

Mr. Noakes seemed slightly alarmed, and he clutched his companion by the arm nervously.

"I don't like this place," he said, in a suppressed voice. "I think we had better seek shelter elsewhere."

"Don't be a fool!" said Wild. "You are as cowardly as a chicken! Bah!—get out—I have no patience with you!"

"Steps!" cried the hag, at this instant.

"Up or down?"

"Up."

Just then Wild's foot struck against some obstruction, which he immediately concluded was a step.

He found he was right, and ascended six of them.

The old woman, upon reaching the top, pushed open a door.

There was a room beyond, in which a light of some kind was burning, so that the dim kind of radiance lighted up the top of the stairs.

Jonathan looked around him curiously, as well as the dim light would permit.

The place was just what he had expected to find.

There was plenty of woodwork, and the stairs he had ascended were protected by a strong and curiously-carved balustrade.

The door was massive and heavy; but, having just given one glance at the objects around, his attention was riveted upon the room which he was about to enter.

CHAPTER DLXVII.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS THE MYSTERIES CONNECTED WITH THE HOUSE TO LET BECOME MORE AND MORE PROFOUND.

The light, though somewhat bright, was flickering and uncertain, as though it proceeded from neither lamp nor candle, but from a fire.

Crossing over the threshold, Jonathan saw in a moment that he was right.

He found himself in a spacious but low apartment, if we may with propriety apply the word to such a place.

It resembled some huge vault more than anything else; for the ceiling was arched, and appeared to be composed of stone, or some similar material.

The fire was situated at the further extremity of the apartment, and was burning on the hearth.

Half crouching over this fire was a somewhat singular-looking object.

It was a man, though at the first glance there appeared to be but little human in his appearance.

He was thin and shrivelled, with long arms and legs, which, taken in conjunction with his face, suggested in a moment the idea of a vulture, or some other bird of prey.

He rose up frantically as the party entered, and glared at them with fierce, inquisitive eyes.

But even as he stood, he was in a strange, bent, doubled-up attitude, with his chin almost resting upon his breast.

His head was bald, with the exception of a slight fringe of hair running round the back part of his head, and extending from ear to ear.

But there was something indescribably filthy and loathsome in the appearance of this old man.

His garments had evidently never been made for him, and were dirty to a degree.

He wore a huge coat, which he was able to wrap round and round him like a cloak, for the garment had evidently been made for a man of rather unusual dimensions.

His hands and face were completely covered over with innumerable lines and wrinkles, in every one of which had lodged a certain amount of black grime and dirt.

Then his forehead and the upper part of his head, where the hair had ceased to grow, were crusted over with the same black, disgusting-looking dirt as covered the whole of his person.

Having risen and bent his piercing, scrutinising eyes upon the new-comers, he said, in a shrill, disagreeable voice :

"What does this mean, Martha—what does this mean? Who are these people? Have they come to view this house? Did you tell them how badly it was haunted ever since that horrible murder was committed in the room upstairs by that cavalier who lived in the reign of Queen Anne?"

"Sweet William!" said the hag, addressing the unsavoury old man by this misplaced appellation, "these gentlemen don't want the house. They have been set upon by highwaymen, and robbed and ill-treated."

"Well, well, what of that—what of that?" he asked, angrily, and fidgeting about with his long, claw-like hands while he spoke. "Don't you know that it's against the orders we received to admit anyone to this place without they come to look at it with a view of buying the lease?"

"Yes—yes, that's all right enough, old fellow!" said Wild, with an assumption of joviality which became him very badly—"we know all about it; but I gave a guinea to be admitted, and you shall have more if you will let me rest here for awhile, and furnish me with something to eat and drink."

"A guinea?" screamed the old man,—"did you say a guinea?"

"Yes."

"A golden guinea?"

"Certainly."

"Where is it?"

"She has it."

Jonathan pointed to the old hag as he spoke.

The old man gave an extraordinary spring forward as he spoke, just as one might have expected a wild animal would do, and alighted close to the old woman.

"Where is it, Martha?" he screamed—"where is it—the guinea?—give it to me, I say!"

"Sha'n't!"

"You had better," said the old man, clenching his teeth, "give it to me!"

"I sha'n't, I tell you!"

"What's yours is mine!"

"This is not."

"My good friends," said Jonathan, "don't quarrel on my account, I beg."

"But she shall give me the guinea!"

"No," said Wild. "She has a right to keep it; but if it will prevent any unpleasantness, you shall have one too, in return for which you must find us something to eat and drink."

The old man snatched the guinea in a frenzied manner as though its value had been a thousand times greater than it was.

"Now," said Wild, "be quick—get us something to eat."

"I will. Never you mind Martha—you shouldn't attend to her—I'm the master of this house. Curse her, she's always interfering and always robbing me; but I'll be even with her some day—some day!"

The old man left the room as he spoke.

The hag shook her fist menacingly after him.

Angry words were evidently trembling upon her lips, and Wild was just hoping that in her rage she would utter something that would tend to clear up the mystery that baffled him, when the loud clanging of a bell came distinctly upon his ears.

The old woman heard it, and so did Noakes.

The latter started violently; but Wild put out his hand and held him.

"What's that?" cried the hag—"what is it?"

"The bell, I should say," cried Wild, "though what bell I don't know!"

"There's some one at the front gates. Who in the

world can it be? Surely not an application? I must see—I must see! I know Sweet William won't trouble himself to go."

The old hag hobbled quickly out of the apartment, and was lost to sight in the darkness before Wild was able to make up his mind whether to allow her to go or to detain her.

The two companions in crime now found themselves alone; but the old man might be expected to return every moment.

Mr. Noakes shook in every limb.

"Did you hear that bell?" he asked.

"Of course I did."

"And did you feel no fear? Does it not stop the current of blood in your veins?"

"No—nothing of the kind!"

"But it terrifies me!" said Noakes. "Let us hide somewhere!"

"Why?"

"They must be police officers at the gate, wh, in some way or other have tracked us hither. We shall be caught like rats in a trap!"

"I doubt it," said Wild.

"You doubt whether they are police officers?"

"No—I think that very likely."

"Then what is it you do doubt?"

"Why, that we shall be taken like rats in a trap. While we have been here, have you not been noticing what strange people they are who inhabit this place?"

"I have. But what has that to do with our present peril?"

"Everything! There's some mystery in all this. There's more in it than meets the eye—I feel quite convinced of that!"

"How? What do you mean?"

"I can't explain myself; for I have only a dim and shadowy suspicion as yet. Still, unless I am greatly mistaken, that old woman, when she gets to the gate, if she finds they are police officers outside would no more think of admitting them than we should."

"But why not?" asked Noakes, incredulously.

"That's her business," said Wild; "perhaps we shall find out before long. Hush!"

"What do you hear?"

"Nothing. I wonder where the old man is? I should like to know whether he's coming back! Wait a moment!"

Jonathan crossed the huge vaulted chamber on tiptoe; and upon reaching the door, stood still and listened.

He remained motionless for a second or two, and then turned round.

His face could be plainly seen, for the light of the fire fell full upon it; and by the expression it wore, it would seem that he was satisfied that no one was at hand.

"Noakes!" he said in a whisper, "we may not be left alone in this place together again! Be silent—let us take a look around; we may find something!"

Wondering not only at his companion's words, but at his manner also, Noakes stood still, making not the slightest effort to obey the command Wild had just given.

Jonathan advanced to the fireplace.

Just then he fancied some slight sound, like the rustling of garments, came upon his ear.

But the sound was of such brief continuance, that he could not say positively whether his fancy had deceived him or not.

He raised his eyes, and glanced rapidly all around him.

His glance took in all that that strange chamber contained; but finally his eyes rested upon one of the walls.

The light of the fire was shining full upon it.

On this wall something was in motion.

Wild strained his eyes.

It was shadowy, dim, vague looking; and, although it clearly moved, he could not take upon himself to say what the object was, or what it resembled.

There was a strange fluttering about his heart.

A superstitious man was Jonathan Wild, and although he had carried off his encounter with the hag very well, yet her denunciations had made a deep impression upon his soul.

He was just in that particular mental and physical con-

dition as to be susceptible to all supernatural influences.

He did not move a muscle, but remained breathlessly gazing upon the uncertain movements of the shadow, and endeavouring to make out what was its precise shape.

He could imagine nothing that would throw the moving shadow on the wall, for he was standing perfectly still himself, and so was Noakes, and they were the only occupants of the chamber.

His heated and excited fancy could no doubt have easily enabled him to form this into something wild and strange, but he was not allowed the opportunity.

The sound of a footstep broke the silence of the place. It also dispelled the charm which seemed to have held Jonathan during the last few moments spellbound.

His eyes instinctively sought the door.

Then the old man appeared, carrying with him some articles of an eatable character, and a bottle of something which looked strangely like wine or brandy.

Wild was much rejoiced when he saw the bottle.

He was languid—very languid from the effects of his wound.

The bleeding had ceased, and he believed one draught of wine would restore him to his usual strength.

He strode forward, and forgetting all his strange and supernatural fears in an instant, said:

"Is that wine in the bottle?"

The old man replied in the affirmative.

Jonathan snatched the bottle from his hands, and with one blow with the butt-end of one of his pistols he knocked off the neck.

Then, placing it to his lips, he drank deeply of the contents.

In the meanwhile, Noakes's fears increased rather than abated.

The very natural idea that police officers were seeking admission to that mysterious house had taken firm possession of his mind, and he listened in the greatest dread and awe, expecting each second to hear a sound that would confirm his worst forebodings.

The old man glanced round him, and then cried out suddenly in a screaming voice:

"Martha—Martha! Where's Martha—where has she gone? That old woman will be the death of me yet!"

"D—n you!" said Wild. "What did you want to screech out in that way for, all of a sudden? You've made me spill as much wine as I've drank!"

"Where is she?" asked the old man, almost in the manner of a maniac.

"Some one rang the bell," said Wild, with great coolness. "So I suppose she went to see who it was!"

"The bell—more visitors! What can this mean?" muttered the old man. "And why was she so foolish as to leave them here alone—curse her?"

Of this sentence, only the last words reached the ears of Jonathan Wild.

Again he had placed the bottle to his lips, and the gurgling sound that the liquid made as it trickled down his throat effectually prevented him from hearing the old man's muttered words.

It was just as he had drained the last drop of wine, and was removing the bottle from his lips, that in a rather louder tone than he had employed before, the old man said:

"Curse her!"

"You seem a nice old article," said Wild, "to curse your wife in that fashion, for going to see who's at the gate, if the bell rings!"

The old man's eyes sparkled ominously; and Wild thought to himself that he should not like to be helpless in his power.

But just then a sound, as of a door opening or closing, reached their ears.

As if actuated by one impulse, all three stopped and listened.

Then they heard voices, indistinctly, it is true, but yet voices.

The shrill tones in which the old hag spoke could be distinguished above all the rest.

Then the sound of footsteps ascending the little flight of stairs became audible.

With straining eyes, bloodless face, and trembling limbs, Mr. Noakes gazed in the direction of the door.

Jonathan Wild, too, looked at it; but the fumes of the immense quantity of wine he had drank, almost at a draught, mounted to his brain, and produced an intense and remarkable elation of spirits.

He felt within his own mind a perfect indifference to danger of every description; and so it was with an easy, self-assured air, that he waited for these new-comers to make their appearance.

CHAPTER DLXVIII.

A BADLY-WOUNDED STRANGER SEEKS SHELTER IN THE HOUSE TO LET.

THE old hag Martha was in her movements as full of mystery as the house itself.

After the loud summons given forth by the bell, she made her way down the steps along the passage and round the mansion to the gate through which Wild and Noakes had gained admittance.

The bell was rung several times; for her joints were stiffened by age, and she could not make anything like good speed.

Just as she was about to dash the little wicket back, in order to see who was outside, a dismal groan came upon her ears, and a voice said:

"Help—help—help me, or I die!"

Then came another hideous groan.

The old woman trembled as she heard the sound; but, recovering herself rapidly, she drew back the wicket and looked out.

It was now fairly daylight, and the mist which had hitherto hung over the landscape had disappeared.

The first object upon which the hag's eyes rested was a horse.

The saddle was empty.

But she could see that the leather of which it was composed and the stirrups were deeply stained with blood.

The crimson fluid had also found its way on to the horse's flanks, and every now and then a drop would fall with a faint dash to the earth.

This was a sight which blanched the old woman's cheeks.

She looked a good ten years older in the course of a single moment.

Evidently the sight of blood strongly affected her.

Then again she heard the groan, but she could see no one.

She drew back a pace, and then her eyes, accidentally falling upon the ground, showed her that blood was slowly trickling underneath the gate.

"Help me—oh, help me!" said the voice again. "I am wounded, and I fear unto the death! Help me—save me, or I shall perish at your gates!"

The old woman stood perfectly still.

Whether it was that terror froze up her faculties, or whether it was that she had made up her mind to afford no succour to the individual without, is hard to say.

Another groan came, and the sound thrilled through her very heart.

She trembled excessively.

"Alas!" said the voice, "I have no longer the strength to raise myself up sufficiently to reach the handle of the bell! Surely there are people here; and they have heard me, and having heard me, they would not let me perish on their very threshold! I must try once more—once more!"

The old hag never moved.

Then a curious, muffled, rustling sound made itself heard, and the old woman knew as well as if she had been able to see through the woodwork that the wounded man was endeavouring to raise himself up against the gate in order to give one more summons upon the bell.

Almost every movement was accompanied by a gasping groan.

And then, suddenly, came one louder than the rest.

It was followed by a dull, heavy, and sickening crash.

The wounded man had raised himself almost to an upright posture, when a frightful sensation of weakness had come over him, and he had dropped to the ground again.

"Surely," groaned the voice, "they have heard the bell! I have rung it many times; they would not—could not be so inhuman as to allow me to perish for the want of a little aid! If, however, anyone is within hearing,

and hesitating whether to admit me, I will promise them gold—much gold—ample reward, if they will but bind up my wounds and allow me to lie down and recover my strength!"

The voice ceased.

It was evident these words produced an effect upon the old woman.

Her eyes sparkled, and her hands moved convulsively.

She took one step towards the gate, which brought her close to it.

She tapped upon the woodwork with her knuckles, and then cried:

"Who is there? I know you not, and am fearful to admit you! I am a poor, lone woman, and there are thieves and robbers in the land, so that I am frightened to open the gates."

"Don't fear!" said the voice again, becoming stronger as hope once more obtained the ascendency, "I shall not harm you! I am a gentleman—a traveller; but I am wounded! I have been shot by a highwayman!"

"Another!" said the old woman.

"What did you say? Don't keep me parleying here, but admit me: for every moment is of the utmost consequence, for my life-blood is ebbing fast!"

After a momentary hesitation, the old hag undid the fastenings, and then opened one half of the large gates.

As she did so, the body of the traveller, which had been resting against the woodwork, fell into the avenue.

He was surrounded by quite a pool of blood, and his clothing was literally saturated with it.

As the hag came towards him he slowly raised himself upon one arm.

"I am getting better now—much better and stronger; that is because I can see some prospect of relief! Before, despair had possession of my heart, because I thought I should perish for want of succour."

"Can you rise to your feet?"

"With your assistance, I have no doubt I can."

"And your horse?"

"Let him come inside. Lead him; he's quiet—he will not harm you!"

As though she had been accustomed to horses, the hag took hold of the bridle and led the traveller's steed through the gates.

"That's done," she said. "Now will you rise?"

"I will. Help me."

The old hag was feeble and tottering, and the aid she was able to give was scarcely worth mentioning.

Still it enabled the traveller to regain his feet.

He reeled when he found himself upright, but he managed to keep his feet, and then the dizziness passed away.

"Bind up my wound," he said—"bind it up, or I shall bleed to death!"

"You must come to the house first," said the hag; "it's old and empty, and I can find you but little accommodation, still, such as there is you are welcome to."

"You shall be well rewarded for your trouble," said the stranger—"well rewarded! I hold my life as a thing of value, and would give much in order to retain possession of it."

It was really wonderful, considering the state he had lately been in, to see what a difference there was in the traveller already.

He could speak with some degree of firmness and ease, and, by leaning slightly upon the hag's arm, he was able to walk.

"It's some distance to the house," she said. "Do you think your strength will be sufficient?"

"I think so."

"Come, then. It's very strange, but only half an hour ago two other strangers, like yourself, sought admission here, having been set upon and wounded by highwaymen."

"I don't wonder at it—I don't wonder at it! He was a desperate villain that I encountered; but I fancy, although he wounded me, that I inflicted a hurt upon him from which he will not recover easily."

With slow steps, this strange pair tottered along the avenue skirting the house, and finally entered it by just the same route as had been taken by Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes.

It was the old woman in conversation with this wounded traveller that they had heard.

All those fears which Noakes had respecting the police-officers were groundless.

He had alarmed himself and endured all that terror for nothing.

It was an exquisite relief to him when he saw the hag enter the vaulted chamber with the wounded traveller leaning on her arm.

It was a relief to Jonathan Wild too.

But at the first glance he shrunk back so that his form was half concealed by the dark shadows which the fire cast.

"Let me sit down," moaned the traveller—"let me sit down. Bind up my wounds now—bind them up, or I die!"

He sank into a chair while uttering these words, and seemed to fall into a state of insensibility.

Another sharp dispute took place between the hag and the old man, which ended in both setting about the task of binding up the stranger's wounds and restoring him to consciousness.

In the meanwhile, Noakes shrunk round to the spot where his companion was seated.

From the position he occupied, Jonathan Wild was able to see with great distinctness every movement that was made by the old man and the hag.

"Mr. Wild," said Noakes, in a faint whisper—"Mr. Wild!"

"Hush," said Jonathan, turning quickly round.

"Silence, fool—do you know no better than to call me by that name while we are in this place?"

"I ask your pardon—I forgot."

"Forgot be d—d!"

"But it doesn't matter," said Noakes—"no one heard me save yourself; I spoke in such a faint whisper!"

"How can you tell?" growled Wild. "People's ears are always quick to catch a secret. Mind how you speak to me in future! Call me by any name but that."

"I will be very careful."

"What were you going to say?"

"Nothing—nothing, except it seems that we were frightening ourselves about nothing."

"We?"

"Yes."

"No—it was you alone; I was not frightened, but your coward's heart is ever suggesting to you a thousand fears that are as groundless as the air!"

"Still it is a satisfaction to find that we are safe; but the peril was not so great as we thought it."

"Is that your opinion?"

"Y—yes."

"Then you're a bigger fool than I ever took you to be!"

"Is there danger, then? Are you sure there's some other danger? Speak—what is it—tell me?"

Mr. Noakes was full of fear instantly.

"You are an idiot—a complete fool! There's danger, but such as I can cope with! Do you recognise that stranger?"

"Who?—the wounded man over there?"

"Yes, fool! Don't let them see that we are talking about him. Of course I mean him."

"No—I don't recognise him," said Noakes. "I have no remembrance of ever having seen him in my life before. Is he a police officer in disguise? Is it some trick to ascertain whether we are here or not?"

"Pooh! Your heart and brain are ever ready to suggest a thousand imaginary evils!"

"What is the danger, then? Speak—pray explain it!"

"Why that stranger over there——"

"Yes—yes!"

"Is the man I stopped on the highway a little while ago, and who gave me the wound in my neck—curse him!"

Jonathan ground his teeth together as he spoke.

Noakes trembled violently.

"No—no! You are jesting. Surely, that cannot be?"

"I tell you it is!"

"Then let us go—let us leave the place instantly! Who can tell how soon he may recover, and then he will recognise us!"

"Bah! I don't intend to move! I look upon his arrival here as being quite providential!"

"Providential?"

"Yes! I have but little money left, and I don't intend to be wounded for nothing!"

"What do you mean?"

"What I said—that it is quite providential he has arrived here!"

Mr. Noakes shuddered.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked.

"Never mind—you will see!"

"Mr. Wild!"

"What! after my caution, will you call me by that name again?"

"I humbly ask your pardon, but——"

"But what, idiot?"

"If for once—only for once—if——"

"What! Why don't you go on? Why do you pause in that manner in the middle of your speech?"

"Because I am frightened to proceed; but if, on this one occasion only, you would condescend to take my advice—if you would only listen to my suggestions——"

"Well—what are they?"

"I fear there is but little use in uttering them, still I will speak!"

"Do so then! Confound it, why do you beat about the bush, and hang fire in that manner?"

"Because you are so violent!"

"Bah! What's your advice—come to the point?"

"Why—you are rested. You have recovered somewhat from your wound; the wine you have drunk has restored you greatly. There is danger in the atmosphere of this place—a thousand perils may be closing around us. Take my advice, then, and leave it at once. Let us seek for shelter elsewhere!"

"Noakes!"

"Yes, Mr.——"

"Silence! Are you determined to provoke discovery?"

"I am very sorry!"

"Bah! Now listen to me, and I will give you some advice—advice of which you stand much in need."

"What is it?"

"Mind your own business, and leave the management of affairs to me. Don't open your mouth on another occasion, and make a d—d fool of yourself! Silence, I say!"

CHAPTER DLXIX.

JONATHAN WILD RESOLVES TO ELUCIDATE THE MYSTERY THAT HANGS OVER THE HOUSE TO LET, AND ITS STRANGE OCCUPANTS.

JONATHAN WILD clutched Mr. Noakes tightly by the arm to enforce his words.

Mechanically, Noakes looked across the chamber to the little group at the other end of it, and then he saw at once why his companion had so peremptorily bidden him be silent.

The stranger's wound had been dressed and tightly bandaged.

The bleeding had ceased.

He now gave signs of returning consciousness, and as Noakes gazed, he saw him open his eyes and look wonderingly around him.

By the expression of his face it could be seen at once that his faculties were clouded.

He did not know precisely where he was, and was striving to recall his scattered recollection.

Then he remembered his wound, and in a strange, stifled voice, he said:

"Yes, I recollect—I have been saved—my wound has been dressed!"

He uttered these last words in an interrogatory tone, and the old woman replied:

"They have. When you have had something to eat and drink, and slept, you will no doubt be better."

"Thanks—thanks!—a thousand thanks for that assurance! I tell you that not only do I prize my own life very highly, but there are many others who place a still higher value upon it, and to whom I am of more importance than I am to myself; therefore, I am anxious—most anxious to recover."

"You mustn't excite yourself," said the hag. "We will do all we can to help you."

"I have money," said the stranger. "I am in no want of wealth, and you will find that I shall reward you richly for the service you render. Don't doubt my gratitude—

don't be afraid I am not liberal. I shall give you more than you could possibly expect."

This announcement was well relished by the old hag and her husband, for such the other most probably was.

Both broke out into a perfect torrent of protestations concerning their intentions and willingness to serve the stranger in every possible way.

"That is enough," he said. "Curses on the villain who gave me this wound! I thought I had rid the world of a rascal. I'm sure I shot him, but he turned round quickly and fired upon me. Perhaps he did it in his last dying agony; at any rate, his aim was accurate."

Could he have seen Jonathan's face in the shade, he would have perceived a grim, mocking smile distorting it.

"I will get you something to eat and drink in a moment," said the hag. "Do you feel yourself recovering?"

"I do—quite fast. I am astonished at the improvement that has taken place. I feared that almost the last drop of blood had been drained out of my veins."

The old man again set out to fetch provisions and wine, and as he left the room, the stranger said:

"What was it you were telling me about two other travellers having besought your hospitality?"

"They are here," said the hag.

"Where?"

"Seated by the fire."

"Gentlemen, I can't see you well. I don't know you. There seems to be a strange dimness before my eyes. But it seems that you are suffering from the same cause as myself—is it not so?"

"Answer him!" hissed Wild, in Noakes's ear—"answer him, and be on your guard—maintain your presence of mind. I dare not speak myself, for fear he should recognise my voice."

This was giving Mr. Noakes a difficult task to accomplish, but he felt he was obliged to comply with his companion's demands.

"Yes—yes!" he said, in a stammering, hesitating voice, "we are suffering from the same cause."

"Are you much hurt?" said the stranger.

"No; fortunately, I am not; but my companion is badly wounded by a pistol bullet."

"What was that?" said the stranger, suddenly.

Jonathan Wild had gnashed his teeth together upon hearing Mr. Noakes say that he had been wounded by a pistol.

Had he said a word, the circumstance would have been less suspicious.

Mr. Noakes made no reply.

"What was that strange noise?" said the stranger. "Did you gnash your teeth like that?"

"No!" stammered Noakes; "it was my friend here."

"Pain—pain," groaned Wild, in so faint and husky a voice that there was no fear of betraying his identity. "My wound smarts horribly."

"No doubt," said the stranger, who little suspected who the two persons were sitting opposite to him—"no doubt you have been injured by the same hand as I have, and therefore there ought to be more than a common feeling between us. Can you give me the particulars?"

"They are few," said Noakes, with a boldness and a readiness that astonished himself. "We were riding along, when suddenly we found ourselves face to face with a man on horseback, who had planted himself in the very middle of the roadway. He called to us to stop. My friend fired, and believed that he had hit the robber; but directly afterwards there was another report, and my friend was badly wounded."

"That's just what happened to me," said the stranger. "The coincidence is exact. But who can this mysterious robber be upon whom a pistol bullet produces not the least impression?"

"That I know not," said Noakes; "for we are travelling from London; and as we live in the country, in a lonely spot, we know but little of what is going on in the great world."

"The attack upon me," said the stranger, "took place very close indeed to this spot; but my horse galloped on, and I found myself fast losing my consciousness. Fortunately, before my senses left me, I was able to pull him up; and to that circumstance, no doubt, I owe my life."

"It was, indeed, most fortunate!" said Mr. Noakes.

"It was. I recovered after a time, and with some difficulty dragged myself to the gates of this house. I looked around, and from where I stood I had an extensive prospect of the country; but this was the only habitation in sight, and so I made my way at once towards it, never doubting that I should meet with the succour and assistance that I have found."

"The same with us," said Mr. Noakes. "We were attacked within a mile of this house; and the wound that my companion received bled so profusely that I was terrified for the result. Like you, I looked around—for my friend could not—and this was the only house in sight; and so I came towards it."

"I am better," said the stranger,—"I feel sure that I am better. When I recover, one of my first acts shall be to discover this robber and assassin, and bring him to justice!"

"You would be doing the country at large a great service," said Mr. Noakes. "But he's a dangerous man to meddle with."

"How do you know that?"

"I don't know it," said Noakes, in some confusion, for this last question took him by surprise. "I only judged by his acts, as you might have done. It seems he has nearly been the death of you, and the death of my friend as well."

"Still, we must not shrink from our duty any the more on that account."

"Here comes food and wine," said the hag. "When you have partaken of that you will find yourself much stronger and much better."

"Believe me, I will reward you—amply reward you for this."

The viands were placed before the wounded traveller.

He had the prudence to eat and drink sparingly, and the meal clearly did him an immense amount of good.

"Now I am sleepy," he said,—"very sleepy, and a long, heavy slumber is just what I require to put me right. Can you not let me sleep?"

"Oh, yes," said the hag. "This house is large and spacious. There are more rooms in it than I should like to be compelled to enter in one day. It's a huge place."

"And to let?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, to let, though no one will take it."

"How is that?"

"The place is old-fashioned, and damp, and deserted. It's haunted, too."

"Bah!"

The word was uttered contemptuously.

"You don't believe in such things, then?" said the hag. "Well, perhaps you may see something—perhaps you may not; but, in the reign of Queen Anne—"

"There was a murder committed, and all that sort of thing," said the stranger, with a yawn,—"blood stains on the floor which cannot be washed out. The old story! Bah! I have no patience to listen to such folly!"

"You may call it folly, or what you like, sir," said the hag, in a half-angry, half-offended tone. "But, however, that doesn't matter. The house is empty, and has been for many a year, and no doubt will be for many a year to come, for who could live in such a place?"

"You live in it, don't you?"

"Yes, we do."

"And do the ghosts trouble you?"

"We're used to them."

"And so would anyone else be, I should think," said the stranger.

"But then you must remember we are poor old folks, and unable to get a living in any other way, and so we put up with that which others would not."

"Well, well; it is indifferent to me—quite indifferent—only show me to something like a bed where I can lie down and sleep off the effects of my wound, and that's all that I require."

"This way, then," said the hag—"follow me! We need not go up into the mansion among the dreary corridors and deserted rooms. There's a place on the ground floor that will suit you."

"Anywhere—anywhere," said the stranger, sleepily—"anywhere will do for me!"

"Come, then."

"Good night, gentlemen," he said, as he followed the old hag from the room—"good night! I trust I shall see you when I wake. You can describe the robber, no

doubt, and so can I, and between us we shall be able to get up a tolerably complete description."

"We shall," said Mr. Noakes—"we shall! Good night!"

Jonathan Wild pretended to be very bad indeed, and so, instead of saying good night, he only gave a half-smothered sort of groan.

The old man drew nearer to the fire, and rubbed his skinny hands together, for he was cold.

"It's strange—strange," he said, "to have visitors, and all in one day; I never remember such a thing before."

"But it's far from being disagreeable to you, I should think!" said Wild.

"Ah, then, sir, you're better; you've found your voice."

"Yes, I have—I am better; now and then the pain keeps returning."

"You drank too much wine," said the old man—"sadly too much wine,—you will suffer for it."

"Bah! it's wine I want; bring me more—another draught will set me right."

"As you will," said the old man, "it's no business of of mine. I should advise you not."

Jonathan made an impatient gesture.

"Here is wine in this bottle," continued the old man.

"You see, the other traveller has only drunk a small portion."

"He's a milksop!" said Wild.

He placed the bottle to his lips as he spoke, nor did he remove it until nearly the whole of its contents had trickled down his throat, and then he handed it to Noakes.

The old man took the bottle and retired to the other end of the room.

"Now," said Noakes, upon whom the wine had produced a beneficial effect, for he was bolder and stronger—"now then, what's the next step? Will you not leave now?"

"No—a thousand times no! I do intend to leave, but not till I have accomplished my purpose!"

"What purpose?"

"I should have said purposes, for I have two things to do."

"What are they?"

Wild sunk his voice to a deep, hoarse whisper.

"The first," he said, "is to take possession of that money which the traveller should have given me at first. I will have it, I am determined!"

"And the other?" asked Noakes, with a sigh.

"It is to find out the mystery that hangs over the whole of this place. I will probe it to the bottom, I will discover it, I will find out who these strange old people are, and have a better reason than has yet been given me for the desertion of this house. There's more in it than meets the eye."

"Shall you not stop?"

"No, it would be too dangerous. But look there, what do you think of that?"

Jonathan, as he spoke, pointed towards the door.

CHAPTER DLXX.

EDGORTH BESS MAKES AN ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM THE LONESOME INN.

LEAVING Jonathan Wild and his companion in iniquity in this strange place, with mystery and peril thickening around them, we will make our way to that lonesome, dreary inn to which Wild junior had taken his captive, Edgworth Bess.

Her position is such as to demand the whole of our attention.

After having been rudely thrust back by George Wild when she made that frantic and ineffectual attempt to leave the room, she sank down dejected, exhausted, and despairing upon the floor.

Then the dismal noise made by securing the door grated upon her very soul, and, filled with all kinds of terrors and forebodings for the future, her head sank upon her breast, and she became unconscious.

How long she remained in this insensible condition of course she could not tell.

By degrees she became herself, and then looked round her in trembling and fear.

What had lately happened seemed more like a dis-

ordered dream than anything real, and her first impression was that she had just woken from a vision.

But the strangeness of the place soon manifested itself to her, and the darkness terrified her exceedingly.

Trembling in every limb, shivering with cold and fright, she rose to her feet.

The darkness in that chamber was most profound, and instinctively she stretched out her arms to their fullest extent, so as to guard against coming into contact with any unseen obstacle.

Her breath came short and thick.

Her pulses throbbed, and there was a dreadful burning sensation in her brain which engendered the belief that she was going mad.

But she was soon growing calmer, as was proved by the first reflection she made.

This was, that her state of insensibility had not continued for any great length of time.

It was dark when she had arrived at the inn, and when she had been thrust into that room.

It was dark now.

From the time that had been occupied by the journey, she felt sure that the night must have been almost spent by the time she arrived, and yet it was still dark.

Happening to turn her head, she saw one part of the room where the darkness was not so profound.

A slight glimmer of light could be seen, as though there was a window or some such aperture.

No sooner did she behold it, than an invincible desire sprang up in her breast to bend her steps in that direction, but she was fearful of encountering something in the darkness, and of doing herself an injury.

Then she bethought herself of the expedient of sinking down to a level with the floor, and in this position she crawled towards the spot which she desired to reach.

Her hand suddenly touched something soft, like wool.

At first she drew back at the contact, and then a second thought told her what the object was.

It was a curtain.

Holding it in her hand, she slowly drew herself up to her full height, and then grasping the curtain higher up, dashed it aside.

A window was then disclosed.

She could now see out into the night, and into the darkness.

The sky was covered with dense, heavy, murky clouds, portending rain.

On the far-off horizon the clouds were a faint, greyish tint.

This showed that morning was coming.

But Edgworth Bess knew it not.

Her eyes wandered to other objects which interested her more deeply.

She noted with a pang of distress and alarm, that the window was strongly barred on the outside.

From the manner in which her heart sank at this discovery, she became conscious to what extent she had been buoyed up by the hope of making her escape.

Now it seemed hopeless.

Then she remembered what the landlord had said.

Not only was the window barred, but down in the yard beneath there was a dog, doubtless of a ferocious species.

She placed her face close to the glass, and strained her eyes in the endeavour to look down beneath.

But she was able to distinguish nothing but a dusky mass of objects.

Her heart beat painfully, and tears started to her eyes.

"Oh, that they had stopped!" she murmured—"oh that they had listened to my pleadings, I should not then have been in this terrible situation!"

Great as was the dread which the poor girl had of Jonathan Wild, it was not so great as that which she had for the thief-taker's son, and now she was in his power—wholly—entirely in his power, to do with her as he thought fit.

The thought was madness in the extreme, and the more she pondered upon it and upon the dreadful nature of her situation, the stronger and stronger became the impulse to dare everything—to run all risks in endeavouring to escape.

"I must help myself," she said, "and I trust Providence

will second me in my efforts. At any rate, I will not sink into his power without a struggle. I will try to escape. If I fail, then I shall not have so much to reproach myself with; but I will not fail!"

It seemed absurd for that weak girl to say she would not fail, in the face of such obstacles as she had to contend with.

"The window is my only chance," she murmured. "If I could get out, I would run the risk of the danger I should meet with from the dog. I would not care for that—no animal, however ferocious, could be so bad as George Wild."

Her whole body quivered with agitation as she spoke these words, but, as soon as she had finished, she made a desperate attempt to open the window.

But she failed.

At one time there had been a swing lattice, and the casement had opened outwards, but now it was nailed up.

Still, this discovery did not cause her to despair.

The window was just such a one as might be expected to be seen in such a place.

It was composed of numerous tiny panes of glass set in lead.

This she felt sure she could remove easily, and so set about the task.

As with all great undertakings, the commencement is the greatest difficulty.

She bent the lead back, and managed to extract one of the little diamond-shaped panes of glass, and when she had got the first out, the displacement of the remainder was easily and rapidly accomplished.

It served her as a ready and convenient tool wherewith to bend back the lead.

At last she ceased her labour, for she imagined she had removed a sufficient number of panes to answer her purpose.

Her hands were cut and bleeding; but such a trifling ill as that she heeded not.

With the same piece of glass in her hand which had rendered her such good service, she tore and broke away the leaden framework in which the panes had been set.

So far, then, her purpose was accomplished.

There was a hole large enough for her body to pass through easily, but she seemed as far off making her escape as ever, for beyond were the strong perpendicular iron bars.

With trembling eagerness, she seized one of them and shook it.

It was as firm as a rock.

She took hold of another, fully anticipating the same result, and shook that too.

But she could hardly repress a cry of joy when, to her surprise and gratification, she found the bar was loose.

She shook it again, and it moved more and more.

Throwing down the piece of glass, she took hold of the bar with both hands, and renewed her efforts.

She had every encouragement to proceed, for every time she shook the bar it became looser and looser in its socket.

Either originally it had been inefficiently fastened, or else, from the length of time, the weather had produced an effect upon it.

Most likely the reason was that both causes had been combined.

Oh, how desperately she tugged and shook at that iron bar!

And then at length, to her joy and delight, it came away in her hands.

But the space then between the bars was frightfully narrow—so narrow that she feared it would be impossible to squeeze her body through so small a space.

She tried the bars on either side, but they were as firm as any rock could be.

And she was to try to squeeze herself through this narrow opening.

But, having done so, how was she to reach the ground? She looked out, and saw that the distance was not great.

But in the darkness the eye is easily deceived with regard to depth.

Edgworth Bess thought that if she got out on to the window-sill, and lowered herself until she hung by the



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full length of her arms, she would be able to reach within an inch or two of the ground.

Trembling with excitement and hope, she began to squeeze herself between the bars.

It was difficult—almost impossible—and she bruised herself sadly in her efforts; but she knew she was escaping from George Wild, and that knowledge made her careless of all other injuries.

At last she stood upon the sill of the window.

She felt giddy, and almost fell; but, recovering herself by a great effort, she held tightly to the bars.

Then cautiously she knelt down upon the sill, and gradually lowered herself until she hung suspended only by the grasp which her fingers had upon the stone of the window-ledge.

But the ground seemed far beneath her.

It was impossible to retreat.

She must let go and chance the consequences and the injuries she might receive in her fall.

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Nor could she remain where she was.

Her arms ached, and the muscles of her fingers relaxed—they were not strong enough to sustain the whole weight of her body.

She felt her grasp slipping from the window-sill, and closed her eyes.

There was an awful moment, and then, with a slight shock, she reached the ground.

The distance she had had to drop was trifling.

Still she lost her footing, and lay in a strange, huddled-up mass upon the ground.

Then, before she could recover herself, she felt a touch upon her shoulder and hot breath upon her neck.

She had much difficulty in suppressing the scream which sprang readily to her lips, but she did so.

Then she looked up, and her terror increased when she beheld two glaring eyes close to her that seemed to burn as though they possessed some light of their own.

Then a low, growling sound made itself heard.

It was the dog of which Nicholson had spoken. He had sprang upon, and now he stood there like a sentinel.

He seemed passive and quiet, but no doubt the least movement upon Edgworth Bess's part would altogether change his nature.

He would become then as ferocious as he was now quiet.

The growling grew louder and louder.

He seemed about to bark loudly; and if he was, Edgworth Bess was well aware that Nicholson would fly at full speed to the spot.

She would then be discovered.

She would then have had all her labour for nothing.

CHAPTER DLXXI.

EDGWORTH BESS ESCAPES FROM THE LONESOME INN, AND HAS A NARROW ESCAPE FROM WILD JUNIOR.

It was a terrible moment!

In what way to act, or what to do for the best to free her from her terrible position, the poor girl could not think.

She was, too, almost paralysed by fear.

It seemed to her an age while the dog kept his paw upon her, but in reality it was only a few seconds.

But as the dog did not bark immediately, hope began to find a place in her heart.

The idea darted into her mind that by a kindly-uttered word or a caress she could soothe the dog and prevent him from giving an alarm.

It was a dangerous attempt to make, but yet her position could not be made worse than it was, and she felt that she would rather die by the teeth of this fierce animal than she would fall again into the power of George Wild.

Tremblingly, then, she put forth her hand until it rested upon the dog's shaggy, wiry coat.

"Poor dog!" she cried, in a gentle voice—"poor dog!"

She patted and stroked him while she spoke.

To her intense delight the growling ceased!

Nicholson was not a man overflowing with affection and sympathy, and no doubt it was many a day since his dog had heard a word of kindness or received any other caress than a brutal kick.

Such being the case, then, it is not surprising that the animal should in this respect somewhat resemble a human being.

The dog was a stranger to kind and gentle words and to caresses, and when Edgworth Bess patted him and spoke as she did, the action seemed to go to the creature's heart.

It removed its one paw, and began licking the poor girl's hand.

She began to think then that all danger was over, and that this formidable creature she so much feared would prove a friend to her and a protector, instead of an enemy.

She continued her caresses and kind words for several moments until, indeed, the dog seemed almost delirious with delight.

He uttered a faint whining cry, which gave Edgworth Bess fresh cause for alarm, for she feared that it would presently break out into a bark of gratification.

She determined to make an effort to rise to her feet.

She was almost frightened to move, for she did not know how far to trust the dog.

He might submit to her caresses, and be kind and gentle while she remained immovable, but it was questionable whether he would continue this behaviour if he saw her making an attempt to escape.

But the experiment, hazardous as it was, must be tried.

Slowly she rose to her feet.

The dog growled.

Fear again came over her heart, for it appeared that her forebodings were about to be realised.

"Good dog!" she said, again—"good dog! Lie down—be quiet!"

The animal seemed to comprehend her words, for he crouched submissively at her feet.

By this time the poor girl had been long enough in the darkness for her eyes to become accustomed to it; so when she looked round, she was able to distinguish with

tolerable distinctness the various objects by which she was surrounded.

A few paces off was a high wall surmounted with spikes.

Her heart sank at the sight, for she was sure it was an obstacle she could not surmount.

In the hope of finding some doorway through which she could pass, she slowly crept forward.

The dog followed at her heels.

Gaining the wall, she passed her hand over it until after walking a little way she came to a door.

It was secured and refused to open, but the fastenings were all upon the inner side, so she was not without the hope that after all she should be able to escape.

Carefully and cautiously she bent all her energies to the accomplishment of the task of unfastening the door.

At length she succeeded.

The strong, heavy bar was taken down, the bolts were withdrawn, the key turned in the rusty lock.

Then the door opened, and before her she saw by the aid of the dim, grey, early dawn a wide expanse of country.

Like a spirit she darted through the door, and, heedless of the many obstructions in her path, rushed onward at full speed.

She did not notice it at first, but the dog followed her.

Turning round, at length, when exhaustion compelled her to slacken her pace, she beheld him.

Again she caressed him and spoke kindly, and the dog jumped about and looked up to her, seeming frantic with joy.

It looked as though it rejoiced in its own liberation as much as Edgworth Bess did.

Her breath failed, her limbs trembled, and she felt unequal to the task of running far, and yet the poor girl knew that in spite of everything she must put forth her utmost speed, or her escape would be discovered and she would be overtaken.

She had no idea which way she was going, or which would be the best course for her to take.

Straight before her was the east, and almost unthinkingly she ran in this direction.

At last sheer fatigue compelled her to stop.

She sank down upon a fallen log and panted painfully for breath.

But the intense fear she felt, and her apprehensions of immediate pursuit would not suffer her to sit long; so, rising to her feet again, she once more dashed onwards.

She still continued flying over the meadows, taking her course almost in a straight line; but she had satisfied herself that she was out of sight of anyone who might be at the lonesome inn, for when she turned round to look behind her, a group of tall trees hid the building from her view.

Away she ran until suddenly she heard a voice.

"Stop—stop!" said some one. "Do you know where you're going! Stop—stop, I say!"

To the excited fears of the poor girl it seemed the cries to stop could only come from behind her, and so she rushed blindly forward.

In another moment there was a collision, and looking up she found herself face to face with a man who was carrying a gun in a negligent manner in his arms.

"Stop!" he said again. "Where are you going to? Don't you know you're trespassing? You have no business on these grounds! Be off with you, I say!"

Edgworth Bess was so terrified and so spent with running fast, that she could not find breath to gasp out a single sound.

The man who had stopped her appeared by his dress to be a head gamekeeper, or something of that kind.

"You're a pretty face, young woman!" he said, still holding her roughly by the arm—"a very pretty face! You're no business to be running over the fields at this time in the morning. Come with me—I must find out who you are!"

This alarmed the poor girl excessively.

She struggled and tried to free herself from his hold, but failing in this—for the man was much stronger than she was—she uttered a despairing cry for help.

She little thought that it would be responded to, but there was a friend near whose existence she had forgotten.

This was the dog.

With an angry growl, he gave a bound forward and seized the man by the throat.

"Murder!" he cried. "Help—help!" Oh, murder! Curse the dog—call him off, or he will be the death of me!"

In a second, Edgworth Bess found herself free from her assailant, for in his alarm at the sudden attack made upon him by the dog, he had not only released her arm but had dropped his gun as well.

She was so terrified as scarcely to know what to do.

The man still continued his vociferations, and then, with some difficulty, she called the dog off, and induced him to relinquish his hold.

The gamekeeper had not escaped uninjured, and after the dog had gone he made an effort to rise, and lay on the ground uttering piteous groans.

Humanity prompted Edgworth Bess to stop out she had seen so much treachery during her short life, and was, too, so fully impressed with the importance of getting as far away from the inn as she possibly could, that instead of attempting to render any assistance, she continued her headlong flight.

The dog still followed her.

In a few moments the scene of her encounter with the gamekeeper was left behind.

She ran on, however, and never thought of stopping until she found before her an obstacle which compelled her to pause.

This was no other than a hedge of great height and thickness.

To break through it or climb over it was equally impossible.

It was thickly planted, and all the boughs were furnished with long, sharp thorns.

Near the top of the little embankment, upon which it was planted, however, it was possible to obtain a glimpse of what was beyond.

Curiosity made Edgworth Bess stoop down and peep through the hedge.

To her surprise she saw a narrow, ill-kept road.

Grass was growing upon it in many places, and in the centre were two deep ruts, caused by cartwheels.

She was looking through, wondering to what place this road led and how she should gain it, when the sound of a horse's footsteps reached her ears.

Some one was coming on at a headlong, furious gallop.

The horse was approaching evidently, for the sounds grew louder and louder each instant.

Oppressed with a vague and indefinable fear, Edgworth Bess crouched down still lower and closer to the roots of the hedge, and waited patiently for the horseman to make his appearance.

She could scarcely venture to hope it was any friend of hers, or anyone who would render her assistance.

If it should prove to be an enemy, however, the prickly hedge would conceal her from his view.

Her patience was not put to a very severe trial.

In something less than two minutes the horseman came in sight.

He was mounted upon a steed of excellent quality, but the noble creature was thickly covered with foam.

It shot by almost with the rapidity of an arrow.

Still Edgworth Bess was enabled to catch a glimpse of the rider's countenance.

She almost swooned when she beheld it, and a shriek rose up to her lips.

It was George Wild.

He was returning to the lonesome inn after his successful journey to London with all speed, for his heart was oppressed with many misgivings concerning the safety of his captive.

Little did he think as he rode along at such a pace that she was crouching down behind the hedge quite helpless and powerless to resist him.

As the sound of the horse's feet became less and less distinct, Edgworth Bess again felt her spirits revive.

She drew a long breath of exquisite relief and thankfulness at having once more escaped her much-dreaded persecutor.

It made her shudder when she thought of the narrow escape she had had.

But for the fact of the hedge being so strong and so high, she would have made her way into the lane, and

then she would certainly have been seen and made a prisoner once more.

Now she began to be conscious that she was tolerably safe.

She was aware of the direction Wild junior had taken, and what she had to do was to go in the one exactly opposite.

She knew full well, however, that going at the pace he did, it would not take him long to reach the inn, and as soon as ever he got there her flight must be discovered, even if it had not been found out already.

It was necessary, then, that she should push onwards with redoubled speed.

She paused in doubt, for after what had occurred she scarcely knew whether it would be safe for her to venture to pass along any of the high-roads.

Unable to decide, she continued her course, keeping close under the hedge, so that it should form some kind of protection to her, until at length she came to a wooden gate.

To emerge into the road was now easy enough, and after a little more deliberation she decided upon doing so.

She ran onwards at full speed, and then presently she reached the termination of the lane.

It ran in a broad high-road which reached right and left as far as ever she could see.

Which way to turn she could not tell, but by chance she saw on the opposite side of the road a mile-stone.

Upon this she saw on one side, "To Edgware—five miles," and on the other, "To London—five miles."

"London?" she repeated; "that is where I want to go, and that is the way!"

She at once turned her face towards the metropolis.

She was so tired now as to be unable to run, and was compelled to proceed at a walk.

Then, as if to form another hindrance to her progress, she saw before her a very steep hill.

It would take a long while to climb up this, and it would fatigue her greatly, but the task had to be accomplished, and so she bent all her energies towards it.

CHAPTER DLXXII.

EDGWORTH BESS FINDS ANOTHER FRIEND ON THE HIGH-WAY.

SHE had to rest several times, but when she reached the summit she considered herself somewhat repaid for her toil.

From the elevated position she then occupied, an extensive view could be obtained.

In the distance she could see the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, and it was a great satisfaction to have her destination in sight, and be quite sure that she was going in the right direction.

After a brief rest, she commenced descending the hill, and this was a much more easy process.

She made good speed, and when the bottom was reached, walked along the highway for about half a mile.

Then she saw another mile-stone, and upon this she seated herself to rest.

The dog seated himself by her side, and looked wistfully up into her face.

Again she caressed him, and felt thankful at having found in the hour of need one who would doubtless continue to be a firm and incorruptible friend to her.

How long she sat thus, she could hardly tell—it was for some considerable length of time.

But she was very weary, and she could not summon up her courage sufficiently to make the effort to rise.

At last, just as she was about doing so, she looked back in the direction she had come.

Then she saw, creeping slowly down the hill, a large, covered waggon, drawn by three powerful horses.

Edgworth Bess looked at the vehicle longingly.

It was going towards London, and she thought, with a sigh, what a relief it would be to her if she could avail herself of this means of conveyance.

It was tardy, but then she would reach her journey's end without fatigue.

The waggon came rolling on, and as it drew nearer and nearer, she made up her mind that she would speak to the driver, and ask him to allow her to ride.

Presently, the waggon arrived opposite to her.

The driver was perched up in his high seat, and Edgworth Bess perceived that he was looking down upon her with an expression of pity and compassion upon his face.

"Woa—woa!" he cried, tightening the reins as he spoke. "What's the matter, my lass? Dang it, you do look tired!"

"I am—I am!" Edgworth Bess managed to gasp out, but yet she could not make the request.

"Be you agoin' to Lunnun?" asked the waggoner.

"Yes."

"Well, then, get up in the waggon behind. Dang it all, I'll give yer a lift! It's a downright shame for you to be walking on when you're so tired. Woa, I say!"

Edgworth Bess endeavoured to express her thanks for this unlooked-for succour.

Tears sprang into her eyes, and she found herself unable to say a single word.

"Come, my wench, up with yer! I mustn't stop long, you know. There be a few things in the cart—such as empty sacks, an' such-loike, and yer won't be much extra carriage."

"Thanks—thanks!" the poor girl managed to exclaim at last. "And my dog—will you let him ride with me too?"

"I don't mind," said the waggoner; "but, axin' yer pardon, and meanin' no offence, he's an ugly-lookin' cur, and that's the best compliment that I can pay him."

This was true enough.

The dog, which had already been such a friend to Edgworth Bess, had nothing prepossessing in his appearance.

He had a vicious-looking head, and at some time or other had been deprived of one of his eyes, which added considerably to the repulsiveness of his look.

Then his tail had been lopped off close to his body, and, from an injury he had received to one of his legs, he limped along in a very odd fashion.

He was dirty, and altogether a very disreputable-looking dog, and certainly not the kind of animal that any one like Edgworth Bess would be expected to be found with.

"He's a friend," said Edgworth Bess. "He's not handsome, but I don't like him any the less for that."

"That's right, miss—that's my sentiment. I always do say a friend's a friend all the world over."

"And you will let him ride with me?"

"Yes—certainly!"

Edgworth Bess climbed into the back of the waggon, and the dog jumped in after her.

"Are you all right?" said the waggoner.

"Yes," was the reply. "I shall never forget your kindness."

"All right, don't say anything about that! Gee, captain!"

The waggoner cracked his whip, and the horses once more crawled forward at their former rate.

There was a canvas covering that hung down at the back part of the waggon, and which caused the interior to be dark.

By drawing the canvas in front on one side, the driver was able to look in; and as soon as his horses were fairly in motion, he turned round and said:

"It's very dark in there, is it not? Would you like to have the canvas at the back turned up?"

"No, thank you," said Edgworth Bess. "No, thank you. You're very kind! I shall do very well as I am!"

"Very good, miss—just as you like. Here's axin' yer pardon, but maybe you wouldn't moind talkin' to a poor fellow for awhile!"

"Certainly not! I would do anything in my power to repay you for the service you have rendered me!"

"No—no, I don't mean that; but if so be as you don't moind talkin' a bit, why I shall be very glad!"

"What shall I talk about?"

"Oh! anything. I ain't at all particular what. But talkin' is a fine thing."

"It is," said Edgworth Bess, rather surprised at the man's discourse.

"When I be drivin' along the road," continued the waggoner, "I often think what poor creatures we should be if we could not talk! Why, this world wouldn't be worth livin' in then!"

"It's often pleasant to talk," said Edgworth Bess, who scarcely knew how to reply.

"Sometimes pleasant, eh? Well, I always find it so. Now, mine's a very hard life, do you see; you might not think it, but it is nevertheless!"

"How so?"

"Well, you may think it easy enough to sit here holdin' the reins in your hands and drivin' yer horses along the road—it seems very easy, but it isn't! Here am I, all by myself, goin' along the road. Perhaps I go ten mile and only have my horses to speak to, and then, when I meet anybody, ten to one if they will take the trouble to reply to I!"

"You're fond of talking, then?"

"I be—I just be! I do like to talk. I don't care what it's about, so long as it's talkin'!"

"I'll talk, then! Tell me what subject I can choose!"

"Oh! any—any. I don't mind!"

"Nay, mention something!"

"Well, I be talkative and fond of talkin', and I be curious, too, when I see anything out o' the common. Now, there's you, for instance. Of coarse I axes yer pardon, but if you wouldn't mind it, I should mighty like to know what brings you walkin' along the road in this fashion, with such an ill-looking dog for a companion?"

"It's a long story," said Edgworth Bess, with a sigh—"a very long story!"

"Is it?" said the waggoner, immediately interested—"is it?"

"It is indeed!"

"Well, then, I do hope you'll tell me all of it, so that we can keep on talkin' all the way to London."

"I don't know whether I could tell you all," said Edgworth Bess; "but I can tell you some. I have been carried away from my home by a scoundrel, and locked up in a room in a very lonely house."

"Have you, though?"

"I have escaped. I was afraid at first this dog would tear me to pieces, or bark, and so discover my escape; but he did not—he turned my friend, and we have kept together ever since."

"I don't wonder at him takin' a likin' to you," said the waggoner—"not a bit of it!"

"Well, he has done so, and I feel very grateful to him. I am on the way to London, but I am frightened to death!"

"What about?"

"About the man who carried me off, and the other who kept me a prisoner. By this time they must have found out that I have escaped. I am sure they will set off in pursuit of me, and I am in continual terror of being overtaken!"

"What, by those two men?"

"Yes. And now will you do me a favour?"

"Certainly, miss. What is it?"

"Will you look back along the road and tell me whether you can see two men on horseback? If you can, you may depend they are the two men I have been speaking of."

Edgworth Bess was induced to make this request, for the wind happening to blow aside the canvas at the back of the waggon, enabled her to get one glimpse of the road, and she fancied she had seen two figures on horseback.

The driver stood up, and, shading his eyes with his hand, looked over the top of the waggon.

"Ay, miss, there be two men, sure enough, and they're comin' along as though they would break their blessed necks!"

Edgworth Bess uttered a scream of terror.

"Don't you be frightened now, miss—don't you be frightened—you're all right. I am a friend, and I will stick by you to the last! Those two men sha'n't hurt you, you may depend!"

"But you would find them more than a match for you, my friend," said Edgworth Bess. "They are a couple of desperate villains, and would not shrink from any deed! What can I do?—how can I escape?"

"Why, miss, you just sit where you are, and leave it to me. I'd just like to catch them interfering with you!"

"No, no—I could not sit here! You don't know them! Alas! I have had all my trouble for nothing! I shall be dragged back again!"

"I say, miss!"

"What."

"Why, how do you know that those two chaps are in pursuit of you? They may be two very different people."

"Alas! I am afraid to think that!"

"Well, take a little peep out of the back of the waggon—perhaps you will be able to tell them."

Edgworth Bess obeyed.

One glance was sufficient to satisfy her.

At no great distance she could see Wild junior galloping along on horseback at a furious rate.

She fancied, too, that his face wore a very angry look, and that his eyes were fixed upon the waggon as though he knew she was seated within it."

By his side was Nicholson, the landlord of the inn.

"Yes, they are my foes!" said Edgworth Bess. "Heaven help me now! What shall I do?"

"Why, miss, I'll settle the rascals, never you fear! You don't know me, nor what I can do!"

Edgworth Bess was so alarmed that she was scarcely capable of anything like clear thought.

She noticed, however, that the waggon contained a number of sacks, and also a quantity of straw.

Upon seeing them, the idea entered her head that it might be possible for her to conceal herself beneath these articles.

"Listen," she said, addressing the driver. "I think you will be able to render me a very great service."

"How so, miss?—how so?"

"Why, I'll conceal myself underneath these sacks. I will cover myself up completely with them; and should these two men stop to make any inquiry of you, tell them that you have not seen me; and if they look into the waggon they will think that it contains nothing but the straw and empty sacks."

"I'll tell them that, miss," said the waggoner. "If they ax me whether I have seen anyone like you, I shall say no!"

The loud clatter of horses' feet upon the road could now be distinctly heard; and, trembling in ever limb at the danger she was about to encounter, Edgworth Bess covered herself over with the sacks, and was careful to conceal the dog as well.

The driver turned round in his seat and pretended to be half asleep.

Scarcely had Edgworth Bess finished her proceedings when two horsemen galloped past the waggon at full speed.

Her heart gave a sudden bound at this unexpected, unlooked-for escape.

She was just congratulating herself that the danger was over, and indeed, was in the act of removing some of the articles with which she had covered herself, when she heard the trampling of horses' feet again.

This time they stopped close to the waggon; and then a voice which she knew only too well, and which thrilled through every fibre in her frame, exclaimed:

"Hoy, waggoner—stop a minute! Pull up!"

"What do you want?" said the driver, slackening the speed at which his horses had been going.

"Why, I want to know whether you have come far along this road?"

"Well, a matter of six or seven miles or thereabouts," was the reply. "I have come from Edgware."

"Well, then, have you seen anything of a girl on the highway? Have you passed one?"

"What sort of a one?"

"Why, young and thin, with a pale face, wearing a small hat!"

The waggoner shook his head to and fro.

"No," he said—"I haven't seen her!"

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, for I haven't seen a girl at all since I started."

"Then, if that's the case, what did you want to ask that question for?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing! I axes yer pardon, I didn't mean no offence, only I thought it would be pleasant to have a bit of a talk. You see, talkin' is such a fine thing. I often think to myself, if it was not for talkin'—"

"Oh, d—n your thoughts!" said Wild junior. "I don't want to know them. What have you got in your waggon?"

"Well, sir, axin' yer pardon, I don't mind havin' a talk

about that. I would sooner have a talk about what's in my waggon than I wouldn't talk at all. I often think to myself—"

"D—n your thoughts!" said Wild junior, again. "What have you got in your waggon? Though never mind—don't trouble yourself to tell me—I'll have a look!"

With these words, George Wild, very much to the consternation both of Edgworth Bess and the driver, trotted round to the back of the waggon and drew aside the canvas we have mentioned.

The interior was then plainly revealed.

He could see into every corner.

At the other end of the waggon there was a pile of empty sacks, but he could see nothing else.

The driver thrust his head through the opening of the canvas in front, and said:

"I have nothing in the waggon, you see, but these 'ere empty sacks and a trifle of straw. You didn't think I'd got a girl in here, did you? I only wish I had, there would be some chance of having a little bit of a talk, for I often think to myself—"

With an angry curse George Wild released his hold upon the canvas and allowed the covering to fall over the back of the waggon.

"She must be further on the road," he said to his companion. "Spur your horse forward—forward!"

"But perhaps she hasn't come this way at all," said Nicholson.

"Don't you perhaps anything, d—n you! If you had done your duty I shouldn't have had this chase all over the country! But she'll make her way to London, I feel sure of that, so that if we get there before her, it won't much matter."

This was all Edgworth Bess was able to hear.

The sound of their voices in conversation died away.

It was some time before the waggoner ventured to turn round and speak—in fact, until he had watched Wild junior and Nicholson out of sight.

Cheer up, my lass, it's all right! After all, the blackguards have gone galloping on to London. They've missed you. It's all right—don't be afraid. Eh! what did you say?"

Edgworth Bess had said nothing.

An ominous kind of silence reigned inside the vehicle, which was suddenly broken by the whining of the dog.

The driver had tried to cheat himself into believing that Edgworth Bess had made some reply to his questions.

But such was not the case.

The poor girl, entirely overcome with fright, had fallen into a death-like swoon.

CHAPTER DLXXXIII.

RELATES THE ADVENTURES WHICH BEFEL JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES IN THE HOUSE TO LET.

WHEN Jonathan Wild pointed in the direction of the door of that strange vaulted chamber, Mr. Noakes, who was ever ready to anticipate danger, trembled and shook as he followed with his eyes the direction of his companion's finger.

Then he drew a long breath.

In reality he saw little to excite apprehension.

The old hag had returned from showing the traveller to his chamber, and was now whispering something into the ear of the old man.

"They are plotting something," said Wild, "you may rely upon that. What it is I shall find out presently."

Just then the old woman came forward.

"I hope, gentlemen, that you are satisfied with the poor accommodation of this place!"

"Oh, yes, quite—quite."

"And you are better, sir?" she added, addressing Wild.

"Yes, somewhat better. A few hours' rest, no doubt, will put me right."

"Would you like to retire now, sir? The chamber is all ready."

"No," said Wild, "I won't go just yet; my appetite has returned to me a little. I was going to eat something when that bell rang. I will try a meal now."

The old woman did not seem very well pleased with this announcement, but she offered no objection.

On the contrary, she seemed all alacrity, for she drew

the table closer to the fire, placed two chairs near it, and spread the provisions with great speed.

Jonathan watched her movements, and wondered whether she acted thus in order to serve him speedily, or whether it was in order to get the meal over as soon as possible.

He thought the latter.

He sat down at the table along with Noakes, and they partook largely of the plain substantial fare spread out before them.

Both were hungry, and such was the precarious state they were in, that they felt they could not afford to miss this opportunity of obtaining a regular meal.

Jonathan was an unreasonably long time over his repast, and he noticed that the more he lingered the more fidgety and uneasy the old people became.

This still added to his suspicions.

At length he turned, and said to the old woman:

"What was that strange story you were telling the traveller about this old place being haunted?"

"Oh! it's a long story, sir, and it would take a long time to tell!"

"No matter," said Wild, "I'm in the humour to listen to it, and before I go to bed I should like to know what kind of companions I may expect to have."

"Oh, you may not see or hear anything," said the old woman, hastily, "but if you do, let me give you one word of advice."

"What is it?"

"Lie still and be quiet. On no account attempt to move—the spirits will not harm you."

"What spirits?"

"Those who in the night time roam about this mansion."

"What are they like?—have you seen them?"

"Oh yes, many a time, and so have plenty more—that's the reason the house has remained to let for such a many years; I think I told you so. In Queen Anne's time a dreadful double murder was committed upstairs."

"By whom?"

"By a nobleman who was at that time the owner of this house. He returned one night unexpectedly, and in secret one of the servants let him in, and the nobleman with cautious, silent steps ascended the grand staircase."

"What did he do?"

"That no one saw, but it was easy to guess. Suddenly a loud and awful scream rang through the whole of the mansion. It was followed by the clashing of swords, then another scream, and all was still."

"What did he do then?"

"All the servants were aroused, and as soon as they could recover their courage sufficiently to do so, they armed themselves and went in a body to the chamber from which the awful sounds had come. When they entered it a terrible spectacle presented itself. On the floor lay the bodies of two persons weltering in blood. One was the nobleman's wife, the other was a stranger. No one of the domestics had seen him before, and how he had gained admittance to the mansion unperceived was a mystery."

"And were both dead?" asked Wild.

"Yes, both. The nobleman fled, and died soon afterwards in a foreign land. I could show you the chamber where this dreadful deed was done, and on the floor the traces still remain."

"And are these the spirits that haunt the place?"

"Yes, one is the wife, the other the stranger. They wander through the deserted corridors, and in and out of the empty rooms all the night long, and that's why it is that this old house has remained untenanted for many a year. It will soon be nothing but a ruin, merely from the want of habitation. If people lived here the old place would look quite different."

"So it would," said Wild. "And these spirits, then, are quite harmless?"

"I don't know for that," was the reply, "but I have never met with any harm from them."

"Then we will say they are so," returned Wild. "It is a very good tale to tell by the fireside and frighten people with, but I don't think much of it myself."

"You don't!" screamed the hag. "What do you mean by that?"

"Neither more nor less than I say."

"And why not, pray—why not?"

"How violent you are to be sure, I don't think much of

it, simply because I have heard similar stories very often; there's nothing new about it, and that's the reason it has failed to make an impression."

"Indeed!" said the hag. "Well, I can't help it being old; but it's true, every word of it, and I could show you the stains on the floor."

"I won't trouble you so far," said Wild; "but you shall show me to the chamber you spoke of. I am tired, and my wounds make me feel very drowsy. Lead the way!"

The hag sprang to her feet gladly.

"Follow me," she said—"follow me!"

Wild and Noakes both rose and obeyed.

"As they passed out of the apartment, the hag said:

"Hush, do not make a noise—you will disturb the other traveller!"

"He's close by, then?"

"He is; I have given up my bed for him."

"All right, it's nothing to me. Which is our chamber?"

"I will show you in a moment. Come, follow me!"

The hag ascended a broad flight of stone steps, at the top of which was a door.

Thence she pushed open and more steps were disclosed.

These she ascended, and by the time they reached the top, not only were Wild's legs tired, but his patience also.

"Why have you brought me up here?" he asked.

"Because there are no beds down below, except the one I use myself, and that the traveller occupies. Here is a comfortable chamber enough, though it has not been used for many a day."

She opened a door as she spoke, and Wild and Noakes found themselves in a spacious old-fashioned room furnished with antique oak furniture.

But upon everything there was a thick coating of dust, and they could readily credit the old woman's assertion that it had not been used for a very long time.

"You will be able to rest yourselves there—don't feel afraid of that; the couch doesn't look very inviting, but when you come into a place as you have done here, you must be content to take things as they are."

"I am," said Wild—"I am. This will do for us very well."

"I am glad of it," said the old woman, "and will leave you; but before I go, I should like to give you one word of advice."

"Very good—speak; let us hear what it is."

"Well, then, no matter what noises you may hear, and you're sure to hear some, take no notice, but keep profoundly still—you will then remain uninjured."

"And suppose we don't follow your advice?"

"Why, then, I wouldn't answer for the consequences." With these words on her lips, the hag took her departure.

She closed the door carefully.

There was a moment's silence, and then Noakes said:

"Mr. Wild—"

Jonathan struck him a heavy blow upon the mouth.

"Fool!" he cried. "Take that! I have cautioned you until I am tired. Now, perhaps, you will remember for the future!"

"What do you mean?"

"You must be mad to perpetually call me by my name. It is absolute insanity! Be silent!"

"For what? We are alone now."

"How do you know that? That hag is probably listening outside!"

"I didn't think of that."

"That's no excuse! You ought to have done so! If you don't care for your own safety, remember I do for mine!"

"I will be careful—indeed I will be careful!"

"Very well, then! See, above all things, that you do not mention my name."

"I will be careful," said Noakes, again.

"Silence!" said Jonathan, in a whisper. "We shall hear whether the woman is listening at the door or not."

A long pause now ensued, during which both listened eagerly.

But although they stretched their ears to the utmost, they failed to catch the slightest sound.

"I believe it's all right," said Jonathan, at last breaking the silence—"I believe it's all right!"

"What did you think of that tale the old woman told you?" asked Noakes.

"Nothing."

"You did think something—I mean what's your opinion of it?"

"What's yours?"

"I don't presume to have one."

"You don't believe in these ghosts, I should think?"

"Do you?"

Jonathan shook a little, as he replied:

"Certainly not; the whole story itself was nothing but a fabrication."

"For what object was it told?"

"That I can partly guess. She had a motive, you may be sure."

"And yet," said Noakes, "I have heard of such a thing before. What she has said may be true."

"It may, but I very much doubt it. Her conduct, and the old man's, too, is altogether most suspicious. Did you not notice what strict injunctions she was careful to give about remaining quiet in case we should hear any noise?"

"Yes I did, though until this moment I did not attach any importance to it."

"That shows how careless you are, then. There's a meaning in that—a deep meaning; but hush, we have talked enough."

"What do you intend to do, then?"

"Not to lie down on the bed and sleep, you may depend."

"I am very weary," said Noakes.

"So am I," replied Wild, "but for all that I can't think of resting. No, I will solve this mystery; depend upon it, it's possible to obtain a solution. At any rate, I will try."

From his manner it was easy to perceive that Mr. Noakes did not approve of this resolution; but he dared not say as much.

With stealthy steps Jonathan crossed the chamber in the direction of the door.

Reaching it, he raised the latch and strove to push it open.

But the door remained firm—immovable.

Wild uttered a curse.

"This door has been bolted or locked on the outside," he said. "We are prisoners!"

This was an announcement that terrified Noakes greatly, and he immediately became desirous of leaving the chamber.

He hastened to his companion's side, and found that what he had heard was indeed correct.

"How this was done," cried Wild, "puzzles me to think. I listened carefully enough, and yet I neither heard a key turned nor a bolt shot into the socket."

"And yet it must have been done."

"Oh, yes, it must have been done! Wait a moment, though—we will soon be at liberty."

"Why have we been made prisoners?"

"For some object. Depend upon it, we shall find out what."

Jonathan tugged away at the door, for he was anxious to open it without making any more noise than he could possibly help.

But he soon desisted.

The door was as firmly fastened as if it had been nailed up.

"We must try another plan," he cried; "but I'll get out, I am determined!"

Jonathan took an ugly-looking knife out of his pocket and commenced an attack upon the door with it.

He inserted it in the crevice between the door and the doorpost, and used it as a lever.

By this means he was able to tell just whereabouts the fastenings were situated, and having made this discovery he set to work to force the chamber open; but so far from succeeding in the attempt, he only broke the strong blade of his knife.

"Curses!" he cried, as he threw it down upon the ground. "However, I'll not be balked by a door!"

Jonathan had lost his temper and his prudence too, for suddenly he threw himself with full force against the door.

The shock was more than could be withstood.

The door did not fly open, but it was evident a very little pressure would cause it to do so.

Before he applied that pressure, Wild paused and listened.

No sound came to his ear, however; and encouraged by the silence, he pushed the door open.

Then he slowly and carefully descended the staircase, Mr. Noakes following closely at his heels.

They reached the bottom, and again they paused to listen.

But all was silent still, and Jonathan, opening the door, continued his descent.

"I can't make out exactly whereabouts in the house we are," he cried. "This seems more like a secret staircase than anything else. I believe that is what it is. We must manage to get into another part of the mansion."

"For what purpose?"

"Fool! Have I not told you that I intend to clear up the mystery which hangs over this abode; and how can I carry out my intention if I don't search thoroughly all over the place?"

Thus rebuked, Mr. Noakes was silent.

Wild looked carefully on each side of him for a door, hoping that if he found one it would lead him in the direction he wished to take.

But the walls on both sides were perfectly smooth, and this circumstance, added to the narrowness of the staircase, served to confirm Wild in his supposition.

"Tread as quietly as you can," he exclaimed, "lest those old people should hear you. We must be very near that part of the house where they have taken up their quarters!"

This was undoubtedly true; and while they were careful not to make any more noise than they could help, they also listened for any sound which might reach them from below.

At last the bottom of this staircase was reached.

Somewhat not far off was the apartment into which the traveller had been shown, and a little further on still was the vaulted chamber where the fire was burning.

Looking around, Jonathan saw the steps leading down to the passage which communicated with the door through which they had gained admittance to the building.

On the opposite side to this was another door deeply set in its case.

Wild felt quite delighted when he saw it, for he made no doubt that it would lead him into that part of the mansion he wished to reach.

He placed his hand upon his companion's shoulder, and with the other hand pointed out the situation of the door to him.

Just then, however, a faint, gurgling, gasping cry reached their ears, and for a moment or two both stood as motionless as statues.

CHAPTER DLXXXIV.

CONTINUES TO RELATE THE HORRIBLE ADVENTURES THAT OCCURRED IN THE HOUSE TO LET.

JONATHAN WILD was the first to recover his composure. His grasp upon his companion's shoulder tightened until it became painful.

Then, in a faint, hissing whisper he said:

"What was that?"

Mr. Noakes did not reply.

He could not, for his tongue clung to the roof of his mouth.

He trembled in every limb, and his face was ashy pale.

"What was that?" said Wild again, for the sound had come upon him so suddenly and so unexpectedly that it had deprived him of his usual coolness.

As he asked the question for the second time, however, all his fierce courage came to his aid.

"Hush!" he said—"hush!—I see it all now. I was startled—now I understand it!"

"What is it?"

"Confirmation of my suspicions," said Wild. "Hush—be still!"

Again they listened—but that strange, awful sound which unnerved even Jonathan Wild reached their ears no more.

But just as Jonathan Wild had resolved to step forward and ascertain if possible what it was that had given utterance to this cry, he heard another sound, but not of so alarming a nature.

This was neither more nor less than the opening of a door!

"Back—back!" he cried. "Quick, up the stairs again! Be silent and speedy, or we shall be discovered!"

He set the example himself of ascending the stairs on tiptoe, and when he had reached what he considered to be a sufficient height he stopped.

Again they listened.

From the position they now occupied, it was not possible for them to see the spot upon which they had so lately stood.

An angle in the staircase hid it from their view.

But they could hear.

Footsteps were audible, then a door was closed, and then, upon the dark, damp wall they saw the faint glimmering reflection of a light.

This was only for an instant.

All then was darkness once more, but not silence.

They heard whisperings and mutterings in the passage below, and they could also detect the sound of hasty, shuffling footsteps.

But in a short time that sound ceased.

Then a door was closed somewhat violently, after which the silence of the grave prevailed.

Nevertheless, Jonathan Wild waited several moments before he ventured to quit his position.

Then, when he imagined that all was safe, and that the coast was perfectly clear, he touched his companion slightly on the arm, for he did not like to trust himself to speak at present.

Noakes understood the meaning of the touch, and followed him down the steps again.

Upon reaching the bottom, the thief-taker again looked about him.

Then, having satisfied himself that no one was moving, he led the way towards the door of the vaulted apartment.

This was closed, and, from this circumstance, he jumped to the conclusion that this was the door he had heard banged shut a little while before.

"Now," he muttered, to himself—"now to find the traveller's room!"

This was no easy task, for the mansion was built in an intricate manner, and time was requisite for anyone to become acquainted with its arrangements.

He saw several doors, but hesitated to enter any of them.

But the attempt had to be made; so, placing his hand upon the latch of one, he raised it.

The door was fast.

He tried another and another with the like result.

Then he went to a fourth.

This one yielded.

Jonathan satisfied himself upon this point by only moving it an inch or two, and he hesitated some time before he ventured to push it open far enough to see into the interior.

Reassured by the stillness, he at length did so.

He beckoned to his companion to keep close to him, and then crossed the threshold.

He found himself in a small, meanly-furnished room.

At one extremity was a window, but it was furnished with shutters, which were closed.

In the upper part of them were two diamond-shaped holes, through which there came a faint ray of light, but not sufficient to illuminate the chamber.

It was a kind of dusky twilight that prevailed in it, which made it very difficult to distinguish objects.

Carefully holding his hands before him, Jonathan walked towards this window.

A few steps took him to it, and then, not without some difficulty and delay, he managed to undo the fastenings of the shutters, and to throw them partially open.

A broad beam of light now shot in.

A faint cry came from the lips of Mr. Noakes.

Jonathan turned like lightning, and was well-nigh betrayed into an exclamation too.

The room contained no other articles of furniture save the bed and a chair.

On the former lay the traveller.

He presented a frightful spectacle, and it was no wonder Mr. Noakes should utter an ejaculation.

The stranger had been cruelly and barbarously murdered, and the bed was smeared all over with blood.

A moment elapsed, and then Jonathan said:

"Just as I expected, my suspicions are confirmed—the mystery is clear enough."

"Is he dead?" asked Noakes.

"Yes, never fear—no one could survive such injuries as those. Look—look, his head is almost severed from his body."

Mr. Noakes did not look, but turned his head aside.

"They have been beforehand with me," said Wild—"I am too late. Those two wretches, beyond a doubt, have plundered him of all the money and valuables he had about him."

This seemed probable enough, but yet Jonathan determined to satisfy himself as to whether his supposition was correct.

The traveller had thrown himself upon the bed with all his clothes on.

No doubt he was entirely overcome with fatigue and weakness, and had dropped off to sleep immediately.

It was not by any means a pleasant task to advance to the bed, and ascertain whether the valuables had been removed from the pockets. Jonathan Wild was not a man to stick at trifles, and so he immediately began his search.

Mr. Noakes averted his eyes.

He could not bear to look upon the horrid scene.

"I was right," said Wild, with a curse—"I was right; they have taken all his money—everything, indeed, of the least value. Now then, I will have a reckoning with them! I will learn all I wish to know, and obtain the money too!"

Jonathan went up to his companion, and said:

"Come, Noakes, don't be chicken-hearted! Now is the time for courage! Put on a bold front, appear to be valorous and desperate—you will find it will answer the purpose just as well as the real thing."

"But tell me what you are going to do?" said Noakes; "let me have an idea of how you intend to act."

"No, that never answers; besides, at the present moment I can't tell. I shall be guided entirely by circumstances!"

"How shall I know what to do, then?"

"Obey every command I give with promptitude—imitate me in all things—follow me up closely to render what assistance you are able. Come!"

As he spoke, Jonathan led the way out of the chamber.

Noakes was only too glad to follow.

Once more they crept along the passage to the door leading into the vaulted apartment, and there they paused again.

The sound of angry voices in dispute came plainly upon their ears, though they were not able to distinguish the voices that were made use of.

Every now and then the hag's voice would rise up to a shrill scream, and before long Jonathan came to the conclusion that the old man was refusing to do something the woman required, and that she was infuriated in consequence.

"Now, Noakes," whispered Wild, "ten to one if this door is fastened. I shall open it and dash in. As soon as I have done so, close the door, and, if possible, secure it."

Noakes promised obedience, and then, without another word, Wild raised the latch swiftly and flung the door open.

A cry of terror reached their ears.

But he sprang forward and heeded it not.

The old man and the hag had evidently been crouching down over the fire at the further extremity of the apartment, and now they were standing up near it, looking scared and terrified.

"Silence!" shouted Wild—"silence! Keep still—move at your peril! Do not attempt resistance, or it will be worse for you!"

"I told you so!" screamed the hag—"I told you so! You would not pay attention to my words, and now see the result!"

These words were addressed to the old man.

"Silence!" cried Wild again, holding his drawn sword before him in an attitude of defence—"silence, I say—submit! Resist at your peril!"

"We are found out now!" screamed the hag. "William, make an effort to escape the gallows—we are fairly matched!"

So saying, the hag in a frantic manner seized a long



[EDGEMORTH DESS'S ARRIVAL IN LONDON.]

knife that lay upon the table, and rushed upon Wild with it.

The sight of his drawn sword, however, made her hesitate and change her intention.

She saw that Noakes was not armed, and so she rushed towards him.

Jonathan did not intend that his comrade should be sacrificed, and so he cried:

"Hold, woman—hold! If you refuse, your death be on your own head!"

The hag paid not the least attention.

Before Noakes was prepared for an attack, she had seized him by the breast of his coat and held him secure.

The knife was already uplifted, and was in the act of descending.

Another quarter of a second, and Mr. Noakes would have received at least, if not a mortal, a dangerous wound, but Jonathan sprang forward just in time to save him.

No. 123.—BLUESKIN.

He thrust his sword between the body of Mr. Noakes and the hag's descending arm.

She could not stop herself, but instead of accomplishing her murderous purpose, her arm struck violently upon the sharp edge of Wild's sword.

With a cry of pain she dropped the knife, and released her hold upon Noakes.

That individual was suddenly endued with great ferocity.

All his nature changed, and he felt a sudden and insatiable craving for vengeance upon the woman who had so nearly caused his death.

Almost before he had time to reflect, or before anyone knew what he was about, he picked up the knife she had dropped, and with an angry cry, drove the long, keen blade into her breast.

An awful scream thrilled from the hag's lips, and she fell back on the stone floor with a crash.

As soon as ever the deed was committed, Mr. Noakes was astonished at what he had done.

But the old man, rendered desperate by the fate which had overtaken his companion, suddenly snatched a pistol which hung over the mantelpiece, and hastily aiming, fired at the two intruders.

The bullet struck harmlessly against the wall.

As soon as he saw his shot had failed, the old man screamed aloud, and, taking hold of his companion-weapon, was about to fire that also, when Jonathan prevented him just in time.

Before the echoes of the shot had died away, Wild had drawn one of his pistols, and he discharged it just as the old man's finger was pressing upon the trigger.

With a groan he sank down to the ground writhing like some wounded serpent.

"Are you hurt, Noakes?" asked Wild.

"No, I think not."

"Nor am I. It seems we have the place to ourselves now, at all events."

"Yes," said Noakes with a shudder. "What awful slaughter!"

"Bah! With the murder of the traveller we have nothing to do; we have only acted in self-defence, and, by slaying these two wretches, preserved our own lives."

There was some truth in this, and Noakes felt it.

"I rather think the house will be haunted now!" continued Jonathan. "Here are three more dead bodies, or, at all events, will soon be!"

"Let us go," implored Noakes—"let us go! Every moment of our stay here is fraught with danger!"

"Presently," said Wild—"presently! But not until my purpose is achieved. First of all, I must have the traveller's gold."

He strode across the room, towards the spot where the old man lay groaning and writhing, as he spoke.

Jonathan touched him roughly with his foot, as he said:

"Now you have your desserts! Where is the gold you took from the pockets of the murdered traveller? Quick—hand it to me!"

The old man made no reply, but turned his head away.

"Come," said Jonathan, "I shall stand no foolery! Quick—tell me where it is!"

Still no reply.

Jonathan then stooped down, and with great violence tore open the old man's pockets, and presently drew forth a large bag containing money.

When he found this treasure going from him, the old man seemed to forget the pain his wound caused him.

He sprang up to a half-sitting posture, and commenced a desperate struggle.

In the hands of Wild he was but a child.

Suddenly he found himself dashed to the earth with a force that shook nearly all the breath out of his body.

Jonathan placed the money in his pocket and drew his sword.

He presented the point of the weapon to the old man's breast, and just allowed it to penetrate the skin.

"Now," he cried, "answer my questions, and answer them truthfully; if you refuse, I will run you through this instant!"

"Mercy—mercy!" cried the old man, as he felt the point of the sword piercing his skin—"mercy—mercy! Remove your sword!"

"Not without you answer my questions. If you refuse or hesitate, I shall bear all my weight upon it, and the sword will then pass through your heart!"

"What is it you want to know, then?"

"Tell me the meaning of all the mysteries in this place—nothing less will satisfy me."

The old man shuddered.

"Don't hesitate. I will know it—I am determined to know it. Speak out freely and clearly!"

"I can't tell you!" said the old man.

"You lie! Why does this house remain unlet? Why did that old hag, who I suppose is your wife, speak as she did as soon as she saw us at the gate? It is evident you do not wish this house to be let. Tell me why!"

"Because—because—"

"Because what?"

"Because it is a refuge for me and for my wife. If anyone came here they would turn us out, and then we

should either have to starve on the roadside, or enter the workhouse."

"That is a reason," said Wild, "and a good one, yet it will not satisfy me—that does not explain all."

The old man looked in terror into Jonathan's face.

"Why have you slain the traveller?" he asked—"answer me that! Is it only a chance, solitary crime, or is it one of many assassinations?"

"One—one," said the old man—"only one. It was my wife's fault—she tempted me; she told me how much money he had got, and how easily we should obtain possession of it!"

"We will quit that part of the question for the present, and return to what I originally asked you. The owners of this house would soon learn that you drove people away who come to inquire after it, and you would lose your place. I am convinced there's a deep mystery in all this, and what that mystery is I am determined to find out. If you refuse to disclose it, you die!"

CHAPTER DLXXV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES COMMENCE THE EXPLORATION OF THE HOUSE TO LET.

THE old man closed his eyes and uttered a groan.

"Come," said Wild, "no nonsense—that will not do. Tell me at once all I want to know!"

"There's a secret!" gasped the old man.

"Yes—yes!"

"But I have taken an oath—"

"Bah!"

"I have taken an awful oath never to reveal what that secret is!"

Jonathan raised his sword.

"I see you are determined to perish! Well, you're a fool! Take your desserts!"

The old man opened his eyes and saw the sword descending.

He knew that, unless Wild stayed his arm, his death would be immediate, and so he cried aloud:

"Hold—hold!"

Again Jonathan pressed the point against his breast.

"Now tell me!" he cried. "You see I'm not a man to be trifled with!"

"Alas! I fear I am dying now; I can feel my strength going, and my eyes are becoming dim! Let me die in peace!"

"No," said Wild, "I am determined to learn all! Confess, or you die this moment!"

One would have thought that this threat would not have produced any great effect upon the old man, seeing that he was already wounded so seriously that his death was almost certain to result from it.

Still, there was a doubt on the point, and so, with that strong instinct that makes all desire to cling to life, he was terrified at the idea of being slain immediately.

Yet the oath that had been imposed upon him must have been one of no ordinary character, or he would not have hesitated so long about breaking it.

When he looked up into Jonathan's countenance he saw an angry glance in his eyes, which convinced him that he was terribly in earnest.

"I will tell you," he said—"I will tell you!"

"Do so. I shall watch your countenance closely, and I shall be able to detect a lie; or, if I cannot immediately, yet when I discover you have played me false, I will slay you at that moment!"

The old man was becoming more and more terrified by Jonathan's threats and manner, and so, clasping his hands together abjectly, said:

"Listen—listen! I will tell all—I will break the oath that I have taken!"

"What's the oath?"

"An awful one!"

"What are the terms of it?"

"No—no!" cried the old man, with a shudder, "I can't tell you that—I can't repeat the fearful words!"

"Well, no matter—I care not for that; it is this mystery I want to solve!"

"Listen, then: This large house which you see in this strange, neglected state belongs, to a strange being who is my master."

"Go on."

"The board is fixed to the outer gates only as a means of leading people astray, or blinding the eyes of suspicion."

"I guessed that."

"Did you indeed?"

"I did."

"We were placed here—that is, my wife and myself—to take care of the house and to answer any people who might apply for particulars. It is rarely we are troubled with visitors, still we are here."

"And when they do come I suppose you answer them in much the same way as I was answered when I rang the bell?"

"Yes—yes! But the old woman is hasty—much too hasty, and her behaviour is calculated to excite suspicion. She ought to be careful!"

"Never mind that," said Wild; "it's no good for you to find fault with her now—she's past all that!"

"Is she dead?" groaned the old man, raising his head.

"Never mind," said Wild. "Attend to your own life before you look after her. Go on! You have only commenced your history."

"We have been strictly bidden never to allow anyone to remain in the house, and even to prevent inquirers from going through the various rooms if possible. To-day my wife was tempted to break the injunctions which have been laid upon us. She admitted you and your friend, and this is the result. You have caused all these misfortunes. We're justly but fearfully punished for our disobedience."

"Never mind grieving over that," said Jonathan, abruptly. "That doesn't concern or interest me in the least. Proceed! Why do you not come to the point? Beware, I will not be played with!"

"I will tell you all straightforwardly and clearly. This house has many occupants—that is, when all are here."

"Who?"

"My master and his men."

"Indeed! Go on. Who are your master and his men? Why are they here?"

The old man tried to reply, but there seemed to be something in his throat that was choking him.

"Speak!" said Wild, fiercely—"answer me!"

The old man made an evident effort.

He still seemed to be choking, and Jonathan, roughly seizing him by the arm, raised him to a sitting posture.

No sooner was this done than there came from his lips a gush of blood, and as soon as the crimson stream had ceased to flow, the old man's head fell back, his eyes closed, his jaw fell, and when Jonathan released his hand, he sank back upon the stone flooring with a dull and sickening crash.

"Curses!" cried Jonathan—"he's dead—dead! Just when he was about to reveal the secret! Curses on his obstinacy!"

Jonathan Wild, in his rage, raised his sword, and it seemed as if he was about to plunge it into the lifeless body of the old man.

But recollecting that it would do no good to wreak his vengeance on the dead, he sheathed his sword, and turned round to his companion.

The fierce courage—or rather fit of ferocity—which had come over Mr. Noakes had now entirely disappeared.

He was once again the trembling, timid, cowardly villain he always was.

His limbs were shaking, and he bent down his eyes beneath his companion's steadfast gaze.

"Are you going now, Mr. Wild?" he said.

"No, fool! I have not yet accomplished my purpose! I tell you I will penetrate this mystery!"

"You will live to repent this," said Noakes, with a sigh. "You are rushing on blindfolded and headlong into ruin."

"Silence! I don't want to listen to your croakings! Keep your fears to yourself—you will not make me a sharer of them! But for that fool, I am convinced all was well. Now I must guess at part, and explore the mansion for the remainder. Is the old woman dead?"

"I know not," said Noakes, averting his eyes from the body. "I think so."

In the hope that life might still linger in the body of the old hag, Jonathan Wild strode across the floor to the spot where she was lying.

He uttered a curse when his eyes first rested upon her, for it was pretty evident that she was already dead.

And yet she might be only in a deep swoon resembling death, from which she might be recovered, and then she might be induced to give the particulars Jonathan so much desired to learn.

Wild took a somewhat original but decidedly effective means of ascertaining whether this was the case or not.

He drew his sword again, and inflicted a slight wound upon her breast.

Had she been alive, that would certainly have restored her to consciousness.

But she made not the slightest movement.

Only a single drop of blood issued from the wound.

"She's dead too," cried Wild. "Noakes, you did your work well! How was it you plucked up such a spirit?"

"Say no more about that, Mr. Wild—say no more about it! I would gladly forget the deed."

"I must have a light!" said Wild. "Look about you and see if you can find a lamp or candle, or something that will serve our purpose."

"Do you indeed intend to explore the house?"

"I do, from the roof to the foundation! Doubtless we shall make discoveries that will repay us for our pains."

Mr. Noakes shook his head.

"What was it the old man told you?" he asked.

"Did you not hear?"

"Not distinctly."

"It amounted to very little. He confirmed my suspicions by saying that the board fixed to the gate was only a pretence, and that if anyone had wished to take the mansion some obstacle would have been thrown in the way of doing so. Such a course as that would not be adopted without some strong and urgent reason."

Mr. Noakes, in spite of his alarm and desire to leave, could not help feeling interested.

"The old man spoke of being employed by some one whom he called his master, and this master has many comrades. Sometimes they are here."

"Here, in this mansion?"

"Yes, so I have understood him."

"Then let us leave it—let us go while we are safe."

"Be silent!"

"I will not! Why should you run this risk? What does it concern us? This mansion is nothing to either of us. Let us quit it!"

"It is something to me," said Wild. "Let that be sufficient. I would have you know that my will is law! Have you found a candle? but here is a lamp that will do as well. Light it."

Mr. Noakes obeyed.

"Does it strike you what this master may be?" asked Wild, "and who his comrades are?"

Mr. Noakes looked in his companion's face with amazement as he said.

"No—have you any suspicions?"

"I could hazard a guess," said Jonathan, "but, however, I'll wait; some further evidence is necessary, and doubtless it will be forthcoming."

"And—and—"

"And what, villain?"

"Do you think, Mr. Wild, that the discoveries will in any way benefit us?"

"I do—I am firmly of opinion that they will benefit us in no ordinary degree; still, they may not—that's a thing we can only learn in time. Go on."

"Would it not be better for you to lead the way?" said Noakes; "I don't know in which direction you wish to go."

"You're afraid!" said Wild—"that's it. Here, give me the lamp and follow in my footsteps, coward that you are!"

Mr. Noakes took no notice of this speech, but handed the lamp to Wild as he had been bidden.

Jonathan took it in his left hand.

In his right he held the sword, projecting it before him in a defensive attitude.

In this way he flung open the door and quitted the kitchen.

"I have one way of searching a house," he said—"one way which I always adopted when I searched houses, and that's to begin at the top; so we must make our way to the top of this."

Mr. Noakes was silent, for it was really indifferent to him what particular mode was adopted.

Jonathan looked about him in search of some door or passage communicating with the upper and habitable portion of the mansion—that is to say, that part where its occupants would be supposing it was tenanted.

At length, at the end of a short passage, he espied four stone steps leading up to a door.

Upon coming nearer, he saw that it was a strong one, and well fastened.

Still he did not despair of opening it.

He handed the lamp to Mr. Noakes and commenced his operations.

Although he was ill-provided with tools, yet in a comparatively short space of time he managed by his dexterity to get the door open.

A rush of cold air streamed upon them immediately, and in the distance they could see a faint, dim, glimmering light, as though evening was closing in.

Once more taking the light, Jonathan strode forward, looking curiously about him.

The silence of the grave was all around.

It was an impressive silence, and had its effect upon the callous thief-taker.

As for Mr. Noakes, he was much more susceptible to its influence, and he drew his breath in short, painful gasps.

After going a few steps, Jonathan, as he fully expected, found himself in the entrance-hall of the mansion.

There were doors on his left hand and on his right.

But all were closed.

Before him was the front door, occupying the whole width of the hall.

Above this there was a fanlight.

It was small, and so obscured by the dust and rain of many years that the light had much difficulty in forcing its way through it.

Still, it filled the huge hall with a dim, mellow radiance, to which their eyes quickly became accustomed.

Jonathan saw all this at one comprehensive glance; and though there were many strange objects round well calculated to call forth close examination, he refused to take any notice of them.

"Come, Noakes," he cried; "never mind what you see here—we shall look at all these things another time. Our present purpose is to search the top of the house. Come!"

Half a dozen steps took them to the foot of the ample stone staircase.

He ascended it two steps at a time, and presently he discovered that far up above in the roof there was a skylight or circular dome, so that, although the glass of which it was composed was thickly encrusted with dirt, yet he was able to see about him on all sides without the aid of the light which the lamp afforded him.

CHAPTER DLXXVI.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES CONTINUE THEIR EXPLORATIONS IN THE HOUSE TO LET.

JONATHAN WILD steadily ascended the steps, still adhering to his determination of gaining the top before he commenced his investigations.

At length both arrived upon the topmost landing, and then they paused a moment to recover their breath, for the ascent had been long and toilsome.

Looking round him, Wild saw several doors, apparently leading into sleeping chambers.

The landing had nothing peculiar in its appearance, and from what he saw he concluded that a long time had elapsed since it had been visited.

In this respect, however, he might easily be deceived, and so he went to the nearest door on his left hand.

He raised the latch, and found the door yielded easily.

He entered boldly, for the room was light.

Glancing about him, he soon perceived that this chamber contained nothing to reward him for his search.

It was absolutely destitute of even the smallest article of furniture.

The walls had a damp, dirty look, and upon looking out of the window he saw that the sun was rapidly declining towards the west, and that before long it would be night.

A very extensive prospect could be obtained from this window, and therefore Jonathan stood at it for several moments, looking carefully in every direction.

He turned away at length with a satisfied expression upon his countenance, for he had failed to see the least signs of any of his foes.

Believing himself quite secure, he passed out of that room and entered the next, and the next, and the next, and, in fact, all upon the top floor.

Every room was just in the same state as the one he had first visited, and therefore it would be tedious to describe each one over and over again.

"There's nothing here, Noakes," he growled, "we may rest satisfied of that, and, what's more, I've had a good look all round for many a mile from every one of the windows, and I can't see the least signs of a police officer!"

"That's welcome news," said Noakes, whose courage began to revive at the intelligence. "I feared——"

"Yes, you're always fearing something—you die a thousand deaths every day! You should not be so easily terrified!"

"But, Mr. Wild——"

"What?"

"Think what a dreadful life this is to lead, flying from spot to spot, and hunted about just like wild beasts, never obtaining any rest!"

"Well, we're not hunted now, are we? We're taking our rest."

"But in what a fashion!"

"Don't you grumble—take things as they are, and be content. You can't alter the course of events, so don't make the attempt!"

"But—but——"

"What?"

"I know it's useless to urge the point, and yet how pleased I should be if I could only get you to see things in the same light as I do."

"What things?"

"Danger and disgrace."

"Bah!"

"You affect to despise them. You're like a man rushing blindfold and headlong to ruin."

"Hold your row!"

"Why not let me speak? It can do no harm!"

"Very true, and less good! Go on—speak away, if it pleases you!"

"Well, then, Mr. Wild, think of this—you have satisfied yourself, by looking from the windows, that none of our foes are within sight. Let us, then, take this favourable opportunity of stealing away and getting to the sea coast; then let us embark on some vessel and make our way to a foreign land."

"Yes, that sounds all very well; but when we get there what shall we do—eh, Noakes? Just answer me that!"

"I should not care what we did so long as the fear of pursuit no longer oppressed me. I would beg or starve—anything would be better than such a life as this!"

"And steal—eh, Noakes? Should you steal?"

"No—never! I would take care to keep clear of everything that would bring me within the clutches of the laws of another land."

"Bah! Noakes, you talk like a fool—that's why I have no patience to listen to you! I thought I would give you a chance during the rest, and listen to your arguments. They are absurd and ridiculous!"

"How so?"

"When I get to a foreign land, don't you think I should want to live?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, and how could I live? Do you happen to know of any buried treasure, or anything of that sort? Can you tell me where I am to find a fortune ready made? If you can, I'll quit England with you with the greatest pleasure!"

Mr. Noakes groaned.

"You can't do it, I suppose? Well, then, we must stay here. I would sooner play the highwayman or robber in England than in any other country under the sun! And do you think that I should be content to toil and toil from morn till night?"

"I would," said Noakes. "Slavery would be better than this!"

"I don't think so. Now, Noakes, I'll tell you what—I've

listened to you, and therefore I shall expect you to listen to me."

"I always do, Mr. Wild."

"But on this occasion I not only want you to listen, but to pay the greatest attention to every word I say."

"I will—I will!"

"You promise that?"

"I do."

"Well, then, although that old man did not make such a full disclosure as I could have wished, yet I have managed to gather something from his half-confession; it may be right or not. However, we shall quickly see."

"What do you mean, Mr. Wild? I can't comprehend you."

"I don't suppose you can at present, but you shortly will. Listen!"

"I am listening."

"Well, then, in considering over what the old man said just before he died, I have come to the conclusion that somewhere or other in this mansion there is concealed considerable wealth."

"Wealth?"

"Yes—treasure, gold, silver, diamonds, jewellery—valuables of all kinds."

"What reason have you for thinking such an extraordinary thing as that?"

"Good reason, you may depend—the best of reasons."

"What are they?"

"Never mind; I will not tell them to you now—they will take too long; moreover, I might not be able fully to explain myself. Here we are, now, upon the next landing. I intend to search every room on this floor as rigidly as I did the one above, until I find the wealth I am in search of."

Mr. Noakes shook his head, as though to imply a doubt as to the likelihood of Jonathan Wild doing anything of the kind.

Jonathan did not see this movement, and therefore took no notice of it.

Some fresh idea had evidently taken full possession of his mind, and from the manner in which he spoke it was tolerably certain that he was quite in earnest, and not in any way attempting to impose upon the credulity of his companion.

Either he was searching for wealth which he believed to be concealed, or else he was searching for something of equal importance.

He entered the rooms on the next floor.

They were larger and loftier than those above; but they were all empty.

When they again stood upon the landing, just before they commenced descending the next flight of stairs, Noakes looked inquiringly into his comrade's countenance.

"You may think I am disappointed," said Wild; "but if you do you are deceived—I am not. It is true I could not tell whether some discovery would be made up here or not, still it was unlikely. Now I have satisfied myself, and removed any doubts which I might feel. The reward has yet to come."

"And you still persist in the extraordinary thought that there is, somewhere in this mansion, a large treasure concealed?"

"I do. Nothing has yet occurred to shake my belief. Come on—there are yet many places to be searched!"

With the next floor the result was the same, and with the next, until presently they stood in the entrance-hall, at the foot of the spacious stone staircase.

In the rooms above they had not found a single article of furniture of any description, nor the least token that a foot had been set in them for many years.

Mr. Noakes now looked more doubtfully into the face of Jonathan Wild, and so he said:

"There's nothing yet. Does your opinion remain unchanged?"

"Certainly. I am now quite sure there's nothing in the upper part of this house, and, so far as I can tell, only the ground floor and the cellars beneath remain to be searched."

"And what of that?"

"Why, having the knowledge I now possess, I shall look all the more closely and attentively in those places, because I shall be driven to the conclusion that the treasure of which I am in search is nowhere else."

Mr. Noakes shook his head again, and he evidently thought that Wild's brain must be in an excited, wandering state.

"Perhaps," he murmured to himself, "it is the effects of his wound, the blood he has lost, and the wine he has drunk. He's in a kind of fever!"

Having brought himself to this conclusion, Mr. Noakes resolved to be most careful in his demeanour, and take care not to say or do anything that would be calculated to excite the ire of his companion.

Jonathan strode to the centre of the hall, and there he stood for at least a minute, looking successively at the surrounding objects.

He counted the doors and observed their appearance.

Finally, he resolved to begin with the one nearest his right hand.

He went to it, turned the knob, and tried to push it open; but, unlike the rest that he had tried, it remained immovable.

Grasping the knob tightly, he endeavoured to shake the door in its frame.

But so well was it secured that he found himself unable to do this.

"It is fast," he said—"fast as a rock! Now, then, we are upon the threshold of a discovery!"

His heart beat quicker, and although he strove to conceal his feelings, Wild was evidently much excited.

He commenced a rapid and vigorous attack upon the door, so as to force it open.

But it resisted him more resolutely than the other one that he had forced.

At length it showed signs of yielding, and then one more push caused it to fly back on its hinges.

"Come, Noakes," he said, "follow me! Give me the light—I will lead the way!"

Mr. Noakes willingly surrendered the lamp which he had held while Wild was at work, and again trod in the footsteps of his companion.

Looking around, Jonathan found himself in an ordinary kind of apartment, but perfectly dark.

He looked around him in vain for a window.

The shutters must have been fast closed indeed, for not a ray of light could be seen in any direction.

The little lamp he held was insufficient properly to dissipate the darkness that hung around like a huge cloud.

Still, they were able to see about them a little.

Jonathan still held his drawn sword in his right hand, and being armed with this weapon, he stepped forward confidently and fearlessly.

Then, when, as he judged, he had gained the centre of the apartment, he paused.

He lifted his arm above his head, so that the lamp should diffuse its light over as wide an area as possible.

He was then able to see the window, which, as he suspected, was quite closed by massive wooden shutters.

Opposite was a door, and no sooner did he catch sight of this than Jonathan strode towards it.

He pressed against it with the point of his sword.

It yielded to the touch, and slowly creaked open to the extent of a few inches.

Then a rush of cold air blew upon his face, and well-nigh extinguished the lamp.

"Come," he said to his companion—"don't lag behind—keep close to me!"

"I am here!" said Mr. Noakes.

"That's well."

Jonathan raised the lamp once more, and again endeavoured to look about him.

But this apartment was, if possible, plunged in a more profound darkness than the outer one.

The little lamp, now that it was no longer held in the draught, burned up steadily and clearly, and by degrees the various objects in the apartment were brought to view.

The eyes of both were becoming accustomed to the obscurity, and after continuing to gaze for a few moments they were able to see with much greater distinctness than at first.

The atmosphere was cold, however, and Jonathan judged by this that the apartment was by no means of ordinary extent.

CHAPTER DLXXVI.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES MAKE SOME STRANGE DISCOVERIES, AND MEET WITH A SURPRISE.

GRADUALLY and gradually one object after another seemed to grow out of the darkness, and before he had stood there long, Jonathan Wild was able to form a tolerably correct notion as to the dimensions of the room.

It must have been at least forty feet in length, by twenty in breadth.

In the centre, reaching almost from end to end, was a long, wide table, at which a very large number of people might have seated themselves.

All round this table chairs were placed, to the number of at least a hundred.

They were all of beautiful make, and ornamented after the fashion of an age long gone by.

They were stuffed, and covered with velvet of various colours—some crimson, some green, some purple.

The table itself was covered with a cloth of exquisite manufacture, and, from its size, must have been worth an immense sum.

The two intruders into this apartment looked about them curiously at the strange objects they beheld, but neither spoke.

At length Jonathan, as he held the lamp upwards, noticed that over the table were suspended four large chandeliers, each one carrying many wax candles.

No sooner did he make this discovery than he sprang into a chair, and from thence got on to the table, being all the time quite heedless as to the amount of mischief he might do.

Then, holding up the lamp, he lighted three or four candles in the first chandelier.

Having done this, he walked along the table till he came to the second one, where he lighted several more.

From there he went to the third, and then to the fourth.

Mr. Noakes looked upon this bold act with mingled astonishment and fear.

Having accomplished his purpose, Jonathan jumped to the floor.

"We shall see better now," he exclaimed. "I knew a discovery of no ordinary importance would reward our exertions."

A moment or so elapsed before the candles fairly burned up.

Then, when the wax of which they were composed began to melt, the apartment became, comparatively speaking, quite brilliantly illuminated—at least, it appeared so to Wild and Noakes, after having had only the feeble light of the lamp.

"This is a strange place, Mr. Wild," said the latter.

"Very," said Jonathan, gazing round him with fresh interest.

At the further end of the table was a kind of raised platform or dais.

This was reached from the floor by three low steps.

On this platform was a large, antique chair, a perfect miracle of complicated carving.

It was gilded here and there, and as the light of the wax candles fell upon it, it looked truly magnificent.

Behind this chair, a large piece of velvet had been hung up upon the wall.

On this could be seen many strange gold devices, which Jonathan was unable to decipher.

Then, down each side of the table, and before every chair, was a flagon, apparently of silver.

The windows were not only closed with shutters, but they were hidden from view by thick velvet curtains drawn closely over them.

It was clear the apartment had no other occupants save the two intruders, and, as he was quite satisfied upon this point, Wild sheathed his sword.

Then, holding his chin with his hand, he reflected deeply.

"What do you make of this place?" asked Noakes.

"How strange—how silent!"

"It is," said Wild.

"And what do you make of it?"

"Nothing at present. I was mistaken in my supposition. I begin to doubt now whether I shall discover the treasure of which I spoke."

"But could you not give a guess as to the meaning of this apartment being thus arranged?"

"It is one of the mysteries connected with this shut-up house," replied Wild. "What it may mean, without more evidence than we at present possess, would be difficult indeed to say."

"But you could guess?"

"I could."

"What do you guess it to be, then?"

"This room?"

"Yes."

"A council chamber."

"But by whom used?" asked Noakes, taking a step forward, and glancing around him in terror.

"That's the question," said Wild. "I am trying to find an answer that will satisfy myself. It is quite certain, however, that it is used by people who meet in secret."

"Conspirators?" suggested Noakes.

"It may be so, or it may not. I am inclined to think so now, but my first idea was different."

"They are no common people," said Noakes. "Do you observe the richness of every article the room contains?"

"I do."

"The table—the chairs—the silver flagons. And, look! Those chandeliers, though dark with age, are nevertheless beautifully made."

"You're right!" said Wild. "They must have been splendid specimens of rare workmanship!"

"And if not conspirators, and conspirators of no ordinary kind, who else could make use of such a chamber as this?"

"That's just what I am trying to ascertain," replied Wild. "There are many strange sights to be seen, if you only look for them in the right place. This, however, is the strangest I have ever seen."

Again, now that the room was more fully illuminated, Jonathan Wild turned slowly round upon his heels, and gazed intently upon every object.

But there was little of importance to be seen more than we have already described.

In various places on the walls mirrors were hanging.

At first they had been invisible, for the glass and the framework were so thickly covered with the crust of many years, that they could scarcely be distinguished from the walls themselves.

The whole of the appointments of the place were rich and elegant in the extreme.

"We shall find out more yet, Noakes," said Wild, "but not just at the present moment, I fancy. So much for this room. Look around you! Can you see any other means of exit from it save the door by which we entered?"

Both looked around the walls, but no other door presented itself to their view, but at length Jonathan said:

"If there is a door, it's a secret one, and well concealed. We will not look for that at present. Follow me!"

"Shall you leave the candles burning?"

"Yes—why not? I have little fear of an interruption. And, you see, the windows are so well covered with drapery that it is impossible for a single thing to be seen from the outside."

"As you like," said Mr. Noakes. "I resign the arrangement of everything into your hands."

"You cannot do better."

Again they entered the outer room, and again Jonathan looked around it.

But nothing more met his gaze than on the first occasion, and so he strode into the hall again.

Then, stimulated by the discoveries he had just made, he went to the next door on his right hand in order to open it.

He quite expected to find it fast, and he was disappointed when he felt it yield to a touch.

He entered, but the room was perfectly bare, and contained nothing worthy of a second glance.

The same might be said of the whole of the rooms on the ground floor which he visited successively.

At length they stood upon the threshold of the door Jonathan had forced first—that is to say, the door which communicated with that portion of the edifice occupied by the old man and his wife.

"It now remains for us to explore the vaults," said Wild. "Many cellars must extend beneath this mansion,

and in some of them we shall certainly make an important discovery."

"But think of the danger of entering those vaults."

"Bah! you think of nothing but danger. You close your eyes to everything else; but I am not so chicken-hearted as you are, and don't intend to hold back."

"Jonathan Wild!"

"What?"

"You continually taunt me and sneer at me, and reproach me for cowardice."

"And have I not good reason? It's sickening to hear you!"

"You affect to carry things off with a high hand; but it's all affectation—not reality."

"What do you mean by that? Be careful what you say!"

Jonathan's tone and manner were both menacing, but Mr. Noakes had such an intense dread of entering any vaults beneath the mansion and exploring them, that he was willing to run the risk of angering his companion.

Therefore, he replied with as much boldness as he could assume:

"I mean what I say, Jonathan Wild! You swagger, and boast, and vapour, but there's no reality in it—you do all these things for mere bravado!"

"It's false! Beware! Follow me to the vaults!"

"I will not!"

"Do you refuse?"

"I do!"

"But you dare not—nor dare you remain where you are; but, indeed, I don't intend to allow you the opportunity!"

"Jonathan Wild!"

"Bah! I say to you, beware!"

"You have need of caution. I said not long since you were like a man rushing blindfold to destruction!"

"Cease!"

"I will not! You cannot persuade me that you have already so soon forgotten what that strange being said at the toll-gate!"

Jonathan Wild seemed at first as though he was about to utter a perfect howl of rage, but if such was his intention, his voice suddenly failed him.

He trembled and shook to such a degree, that the lamp seemed every moment as though it would fall from his grasp.

The blood retreated from his face, leaving it of a sickly, yellow, corpse-like tint.

Mr. Noakes perceived that he had made an impression, and though he was not a little alarmed at his boldness at having said what he had, he determined to improve upon the occasion to deepen it.

"You may affect to despise those words, Jonathan Wild," he continued, "but in your heart of hearts you feel that they are true; you feel you know that what she has prophesied will assuredly come to pass."

"Silence!" shrieked Wild, at length recovering his voice—"silence! If you say another word upon that topic, I will slay you where you stand!"

But his chattering teeth and trembling limbs deprived this threat of its force, and therefore Mr. Noakes assumed a bold front himself—in fact, as Jonathan showed signs of fear, so did his own courage seem to rise.

"You will not," he cried, stepping back a pace or two—"you dare not!"

"Dare not?"

"No—I say you dare not. You pretend to be very valourous, and very courageous, Jonathan Wild, but it's all a pretence at heart—you are a greater coward than I am!"

"You are a fool, Noakes, or you would not say so!"

"I am no fool, for I know full well that you dare not carry out your threat of slaying me!"

"Why not?"

"Because the courage you possess is of that character, that it only makes any show at all when another person is by. I am certain, Jonathan Wild, in spite of all your boldness and apparent daring, that you would be frightened—frightened to death to be in the mansion alone!"

Wild laughed.

But it was a hideous, shrieking, unmirthful kind of laugh, and it was evidently uttered merely for the sake of concealing his true feelings.

"You can maintain a show of courage when some one is with you," continued Mr. Noakes, "but you can't if

you are by yourself; that's the reason why you insist upon making me your companion. I know full well that's the reason, or you would not encumber yourself with me."

"Will you be silent?" roared Wild. "At least I have some power over you! Be silent, or tremble for the consequences!"

"Then give up your insane project of searching the vaults beneath this house."

"I will not!"

"Well, then, let me ask you whether you consider that what that old hag prophesied will come true? Do you believe that, in spite of all your acts, you will at length swing from Tyburn Tree?"

"No," he said, with a ghastly smile; "I am sure that will not be. Let what death will overtake me, that shall not! I have sworn it thousands of times, and I will be as good as my word!"

"That is the reason, then, why you recklessly and foolishly pursue the course you do. Tell me by what means you hope to escape the hangman's rope."

"Why, if I was captured—if I was again placed in Newgate, I would batter my head against the stone walls until life was extinct; or I would tear open an artery in my arm with my teeth; in short, a thousand things rather than my enemies should obtain that triumph over me!"

Mr. Noakes shuddered.

"It is well for you to try to turn the imputation of cowardice upon me, but we shall see—deeds shall prove which is the coward! Refuse me at your peril! Come this way, I say—we will descend to the vaults together!"

"Never!" said Noakes. "I know you dare not slay me—I am quite sure of that; and you may try to drag me down by main force, but if you do I will resist you to the utmost!"

"Come, come, Noakes," cried Jonathan, changing his voice and manner; "this will do no good. Let there once more be the same good understanding between us that has existed up to the present time. Are you willing that?"

"Only on certain conditions."

"Speak—name them! What are they?"

"First, that you—"

What Mr. Noakes would have demanded is hard to say, for at that moment he paused in the middle of his sentence.

The reason was that the loud clanging of a bell somewhere close at hand struck upon his ear.

It was a terrific pull; and just as the sound was beginning to die away it was renewed with fresh violence.

"What—what's that?" gasped Wild, leaning against the door-post to support himself.

Mr. Noakes trembled and shook like an aspen-leaf.

His face was bloodless.

His lips moved convulsively, and his eyes glared in the extremity of fear.

At last he managed to gasp out:

"Lost, lost—all is lost! It is as I feared—the officers are upon us!"

Again the silence of that dreary habitation was broken in upon by a third pull upon the bell.

CHAPTER DDXXVII.

EDGORTH BESS SUCCEEDED IN ELUDING WILD JUNIOR, AND ARRIVES IN LONDON.

THE alarm of the kind-hearted waggoner was very great indeed when he found that his inquiries elicited no response.

What could be the meaning of this silence he was at first at a loss to imagine, and so he called out again in a much louder tone of voice than before.

But Edgworth Bess was as deaf to all outward signs as she would be if dead.

The dog whined and scratched, and then the waggoner, feeling convinced in his own mind that something serious was amiss, scratched his head and wondered what he should do.

"I often said," he muttered, "that talkin' was a fine thing, and here's a proof of it. Now, if I'd got some one to talk to, why, of course, I should know what was the best thing to be done. Come, miss, you needn't be afraid—they're gone now! Get up, and see yourself!"

Still there was no reply.

Then, having satisfied himself by a glance up and down the road that no other persons whatever were in sight, the waggoner drew aside the canvas and scrambled into the interior of the vehicle.

With hasty hands he removed the sacks, and then he saw the poor girl he had befriended lying calm, motionless and deathlike underneath the sacks.

It was quite a shock to him when he lifted the first one and caught sight of her pale, rigid face.

"Is she dead, I wonder?" he exclaimed, involuntarily; "or has she only swooned? What a fine thing talkin' is, to be sure! What shall I do?"

The waggoner had not had much experience in recovering females from fainting fits, but yet he had a dim and hazy notion that cold water was the thing required.

Accordingly he took down a jug from a rail by which it was suspended to the top of the waggon and then, alighting, he looked about him for some clear cold water.

First, however, he gave another anxious glance up and down the road.

But, as before, not a single living thing was in sight.

Even the cloud of dust which had remained for some time showing the direction which Wild junior and Nicholson had taken had quite disappeared.

"Now for the water," said the waggoner.

"There was a ditch at each side of the road, but the water was of so foul and stagnant a character that he shook his head, with the remark:

"That won't do, I'm sure! Where, in the world, am I to look for it?"

Just then he happened to perceive a little spring in the bank upon which the hedgerow was planted.

The water oozed forth slowly, and had collected into a kind of mimic basin it had formed for itself in the fine, gravelly soil.

With a cry of delight he filled the jug and hastened back to the waggon.

Upon reaching it he found that his fair passenger had recovered from the faint into which her fright had thrown her.

She was half-sitting up upon the sacks, looking around her with a dreamy, wondering expression.

For some moments she was at a loss to think where she could be.

The whining of the dog, however, as he importuned her to caress him, served in a great measure to bring back the past to her mind.

Just when she recollected that the last thing she had heard was the hateful voice of Wild junior, she saw the waggoner hastening towards her.

"There you are, miss! Well, I'm right glad to see you so much better! I did indeed fear you had gone dead; and not knowing what else better to do, I fetched this water, you see."

"Thanks!—thanks!"

Edgworth Bess reached out her hand and drank some of the water contained in the jug with great relish.

She was wonderfully revived by the draught.

Fresh strength returned to her limbs, and she looked up into the honest countenance of her preserver with a faint and feeble smile.

"I don't know how I shall be able to reward you for your kindness to me!" she said.

"I want no reward, miss. Lor' bless yer, I won't think about that, when I would have done it ten times over rather than you should have fallen into the hands of the couple of ugly-looking rascals who came inquiring for you!"

"Ah! they are gone?"

"Never doubt that, miss! They're far enough away by this time. I watched them along the road until there was only a cloud of dust left to show which way they had gone."

Edgworth Bess clasped her hands in thankfulness.

"I feared they would discover me!" she said.

"No, miss; it's all right, and a very good job it is! Why, now, my waggon may be the very safest place in all the world for you!"

"Why?"

"Don't you know they have looked into it once and satisfied themselves that you are not in it; so they will look everywhere else for you, and never think of looking into the waggon again."

"I hope such will prove to be the case," said Edgworth

Bess. "But you don't know the man. He's very—very cunning."

"Well, I don't care how cunning he is," said the waggoner, with great determination; "but if he finds out you are here, he won't get hold of you very easy, I can tell you that! I should try what virtue there was in my horsewhip!"

Edgworth Bess smiled, and felt thankful—oh, so thankful!—to think she had found one who was determined to protect her.

She felt easy and confident.

"Well, now, miss," said the waggoner, "seeing that you are so much better, I think the best thing we can do is to continue the journey. We're not far from London now, and I suppose that's where you're going to?"

"Yes—yes, to London. That is where I shall find my friends; at least, I hope so."

The waggoner shook his head.

"Ah!" he cried, "it's a pity you have to hope in the matter. You ought to know for a certainty."

"They may be searching for me," she said; "and, perhaps, miles away."

"Well, miss, I tell you, candidly, I hope not; for they're a couple of ugly customers who are after you, and you want a strong arm by your side all the time to protect you."

"I know that. Let me thank you again and again for what you have done in my behalf."

"Pooh—pooh! It's been just nothing at all. You're sure you're better, miss?"

"Oh, yes; much better."

"Well, then, miss, we'll start again; and I hope we sha'n't be troubled with those rascals again."

With these words, the waggoner scrambled into his seat again, and, after a few flourishes and cracks of his long whip, the team set itself in motion.

The horses were well trained, and performed their work almost as if by a kind of instinct; so that, when they had once started, they required but little attention in the way of driving. Therefore, the waggoner held the reins negligently in his hands, and turned round from time to time to speak to Edgworth Bess.

He was exceedingly fond of talking, and now he had an opportunity of gratifying his propensity, for Edgworth Bess listened attentively to all he said.

Every now and then, however, feeling anxious about Wild junior, and his companion Nicholson, she would entreat him to look carefully along the road to ascertain whether they were in sight.

On each occasion, the waggoner would shake his head, and say:

"No, miss; it's all right. They're not on the road, you may depend. They're in London by this time."

"And what part of London are you going to?" she asked.

"Well, I be goin' to St. Katherine's Docks, to get my load. Will that be anywhere in the direction you want to go?"

"Yes—yes. When we're in London—say when we are near Charing Cross—let me alight."

"All right, miss; wherever you like, of course. But I shall be main sorry to part with you, and that's the truth. I wish I could always make sure of such pleasant company on my long journeys."

"They must be very tedious."

"I don't know about that, miss, seeing as I don't understand what teetj means; but they're very uncomfortable and disagreeable, I can tell you that; for I often think to myself, 'What a fine thing talkin' is!' and yet I can hardly ever get any of it."

In such-like conversation as this, the time occupied by the journey to London was whiled away; and, at length, just as the business of the day was beginning, the waggon stopped in a little side street, branching off from the Strand.

"Will this do for you, miss?" asked the waggoner, in his kind, cheerful voice. "If so, why, perhaps it's all the better; because, you see, in this street there's a house where I generally stop just for a bit of a snack; and, maybe, you wouldn't mind taking a snack with me, this morning?"

Edgworth Bess availed herself gladly of this opportunity of obtaining some refreshment, and she warmly signified her willingness.



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES ARE ALARMED BY THE RINGING OF THE BELL.]

"V y good, miss! Well, here we are, you see, close to the public-house. That's it. The Old House at Home is the sign of it, and that's why I like to stop at it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and the landlady, she's a right-down civil body, she is, and no mistake! We often talk to each other. She's very fond of a talk, is that landlady, and that's why I like to stop at her house for a snack."

Willingness to converse was indeed about the greatest recommendation to the waggoner that anyone could have.

As soon as he had uttered these explanatory words, he secured the reins to his seat and got down.

Then, going to the back of the waggon, he drew aside the canvas, and assisted Edgworth Bess to alight.

She sprang to the ground easily. The dog followed.

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Then this strange pair took a few paces across the pavement, and entered the old-fashioned-looking public-house, which has long since disappeared.

The waggoner was evidently well known to all the people at the place, for he nodded and spoke to everyone.

Then he sat down at a side table, and took his snack, which consisted of a quart of ale, a quartern loaf, and about two pounds of cheese.

The waggoner introduced Edgworth Bess to the landlady, and requested that she would furnish a comfortable meal.

To this the landlady assented, for the waggoner was quite an old friend, and a regular customer besides.

It was truly astonishing to behold the rapidity with which the bread and cheese and ale disappeared; and having hurriedly washed down the last morsel, he said:

"You must excuse me now, miss, but I must say good-

bye to you. I have lost a goodish bit of time this morning one way and another, so I must make haste, or I shall not get to the docks at the proper time."

Again did Edgworth Bess pour out her thanks for his kindness.

He interrupted her by saying:

"It's nothing—it's nothing! And the landlady here of The Old House at Home will treat you with respect—I am sure she will, just the same as if it was myself; so good-bye to you, and may you soon find your friends and be happy!"

With these words the honest, warm-hearted fellow took his departure, and Edgworth Bess felt her heart sink at this parting with one who had shown himself a true friend.

CHAPTER DLXXVIII.

RETURNS TO JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES AT THE HOUSE TO LET, AND RELATES WHAT FOLLOWED THE RINGING OF THE BELL.

WHEN that loud ringing of the bell broke in upon the silence of that deserted mansion, even Jonathan Wild trembled and shook, while, for a moment at least, he shared to the full all the terror that was felt by Mr. Noakes.

It will be recollected that that individual had succeeded in plucking up a certain amount of courage.

He had been, as it were, forced at bay, and compelled to turn round in self-defence against his companion.

He had defied him, and was even about to impose certain conditions upon Jonathan, and, but for the interruption, no doubt they would have been acquiesced in.

The ringing of the bell seemed, however, by some mysterious process, to create a complete metamorphosis.

All his new-born courage vanished completely and instantaneously.

The first fear that had suggested itself to his mind was, that the police-officers had ascertained, by some means or other, that they had taken up their quarters in that habitation, and were about to make an attack upon it.

Therefore, when he spoke the hurried words we have already recorded, he stepped forward a pace and clutched hold of Jonathan Wild by the arm with such nervous force that an angry, growling oath resulted from the pain the grip caused.

"Stand off, fool!" cried Wild, who had by this time entirely recovered his self-possession—"stand off, I say! Beware!"

As he spoke, Jonathan Wild, by an easy exertion of his great strength, broke from the tightening grasp of his companion.

Noakes staggered back.

His limbs shook under him.

He would have fallen to the ground had he not providentially reached the wall, which supported him.

"Officers!" he repeated, between his teeth and quivering lips—"officers!"

"They are not officers, idiot!" returned Wild.

"How do you know that?"

"I do know it."

"How—how?"

"Because they would not come here unless they were either aware of or suspected our presence."

"Well—well?"

"And, in either case, do you think they would come ringing and making such an uproar as that on purpose to place us on our guard? Bah!—I have no patience to explain the matter any further to you!"

Again the bell sounded, and again it seemed to produce the mysterious effect upon Mr. Noakes.

He had gathered some sort of encouragement from Wild's remarks, but the mere sound of the heavy clanging strokes of the clapper of the bell against the sides sufficed to prostrate all his mental faculties.

As before, the ring was succeeded by another as soon as the echoes of the first had died away, and then there came another, after which, as before, there was a long pause.

From this it was pretty clear that three rings in succession formed some kind of a signal to those within—at least, that was the interpretation which Jonathan Wild placed upon it.

As soon as silence prevailed, Mr. Noakes, who could not get rid of his original notion, inquired:

"Mr. Wild, do you really think that they are not officers?"

"Think?—I am sure of it! If they knew we were here, they would seek an entrance to the place by the most secret means they could think of, and steal upon us and seize us unawares, and not give us ample warning of their coming."

There were sound logic and common-sense in this, and Mr. Noakes, in spite of all his fears, could not help being aware of it and feeling convinced.

"But," he asked, half trembling, "if they are not officers, who can they be?"

"That is the question," said Wild, "I am trying to decide."

"But why trouble about the point at all?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why not steal out of the house into the grounds, and, favoured by the darkness, get away altogether?"

"Bah!—I will not listen to you—you are ever harping upon one string. I will not leave, as I have said before, until I have fully investigated all these strange events, and come to a conclusion respecting them."

Mr. Noakes sighed.

"Those who are ringing at that bell," continued Wild, "are connected with the mysteries of this mansion. There can be no doubt about that—none whatever!"

Mr. Noakes made no reply.

"They have given the signal—three rings upon the bell. They desire admittance—but for what?"

It will be seen from the nature of these words that Jonathan Wild spoke them more to himself than to his companion.

It might be said that they were uttered half aloud.

Then the expression of his countenance changed as a sudden thought darted into his mind.

Seizing his companion by the arm, he said:

"Come—come!"

"Where?"

"We will leave the house."

A cry of joy rose to the lips of Mr. Noakes, but it died away there, and a smile of incredulity took its place.

"Come!" said Wild again, and as he spoke he dragged Mr. Noakes forward.

He was only too glad to follow, and, very much to his astonishment, he found that Jonathan Wild took his way in the very direction which they had been brought by the old woman. But just as they passed through the little door into the grounds, the bell began to ring for the third time.

"That's it!" cried Wild, in a half-suppressed voice. "I guessed it, and now I am convinced!"

"Of what—of what?"

"That I interpret the signal aright. Quick, this way—we may yet be in time!"

Mr. Noakes could not for the life of him make out what Wild meant, and he began to think that the blood he had lost had wrought some strange effect upon his brain.

"Tell me," he cried—"tell me what you mean? don't leave me to guess all; anything is better than suspense!"

"Why, can't you see?" said Wild, still hurrying along through the grounds. "Does it not strike you that a particular signal has been given?"

"The ringing of the bell?"

"Yes—but not that simply, but the peculiar mode of ringing?"

"How so?"

"The bell has been rung three times thrice—that's the signal. Nine pulls upon the bell altogether, three close together, then an interval, and three close together again, another interval, and three close together once more."

"But what of that?"

"Silence! Speak another word at your peril! There is danger now, and everything depends upon your caution. Remember—don't breathe!"

Jonathan stepped briskly along the gravel path, Mr. Noakes following by his side.

It was intensely dark; objects close at hand could not be distinguished, and it was really wonderful to see with what facility Jonathan Wild made his way through that strange place.

He had never been in the neglected garden round the mansion but once before, and yet, in the profound darkness, he took his way through it with as much ease and

certainly as he could have done had he been familiar with it for years.

There were those who said that Jonathan Wild possessed the uncommon faculty of seeing in the darkness, and certainly, if anything could have pointed to such a belief, his behaviour on the present occasion would.

Mr. Noakes was so excited and so frightened, that he could not form the remotest idea of what his companion was going to do.

He did not dare to hope that they were about to leave the premises altogether, Jonathan spoke too decidedly for that.

Suddenly he felt Wild press his arm in a significant manner.

At the same time a faint whisper reached his ears.

"Stand here. Move not—speak not!"

Noakes obeyed; in fact, he never once dreamt of disobeying the command.

Then Jonathan Wild, who had paused close to the gate through which he had gained admission to the mansion, coolly proceeded to unfasten it.

The murmuring of voices on the outside could be plainly heard, and, by the tone, he judged that the speakers were growing impatient and angry at having been kept waiting so long.

Therefore Jonathan Wild with all possible speed removed the fastenings of the gate and finally flung it open.

"Why are you so late, you old witch?" said some one, in a deep, sepulchral voice.

It was evident that the speaker imagined the old woman had opened the gate, as doubtless it was her duty to do.

In consequence of the darkness, and, besides, in consequence of Jonathan Wild standing so that his body was more than half concealed by the door, the new-comer did not observe the difference.

He strode in, and Jonathan, by straining his eyes, managed to make out that it was a tall figure wrapped in a horseman's cloak.

Then another followed, who said:

"Why did you neglect the signal?—why are you so late?"

"I am very sorry," said Wild—"very sorry!"

Noakes started.

He was terrified to death by what had taken place, and when Jonathan Wild spoke, the tones of his voice were so entirely changed, and so exactly resembled the voice of the old man, that he could scarcely believe anyone else had spoken.

It was a peculiar voice that the old man had possessed, and Jonathan Wild, having noticed it, was able to imitate to perfection.

The stranger who had spoken stopped as soon as Wild replied, and said:

"Why, is that you, William? How is it that you are here at the gate?"

"The old woman slipped down the steps about an hour ago, and has hurt her leg," replied Wild, in so offhand a way that no one could have believed the answer to be a fictitious one. "She tried to come at first, in spite of her hurt, but she could not, so I came, and that's why we were so long."

The stranger passed on, apparently satisfied with the explanation, and then Jonathan, turning his eyes round, saw something which immediately attracted the whole of his attention.

His eyes had now become to a great extent familiar with the darkness, and he was able to see about him—though very indistinctly—a crowd of figures all dressed alike, standing so closely together that he could not count them as they came in at the gate.

They appeared to be carrying some very heavy object carefully between them.

What that object was, Jonathan tried in vain to make out.

It was something dark and bulky, and of considerable length.

His curiosity was raised to the highest pitch.

The bearers of this burden spoke to each other in low, faint murmurs—so low that Jonathan could not make out a single word.

Yet he fancied they were all much distressed or troubled about something.

Then one, who was the last in the throng, said, in a

voice which closely resembled that one who had entered first:

"Close the door!"

Jonathan thought he had better not trust himself to reply, and so silently obeyed this mandate.

The throng of strangers were apparently so deeply engrossed by what they were doing as to be unmindful of everything else.

Not one of them paused or looked back, or troubled himself in any way to ascertain whether the order that had been given was obeyed.

But Jonathan closed the door, and made it quite secure—at least, anyone would have judged that he had done so by the rattling of the chains and the creaking of the bolts.

But in reality he left the door so that he could throw it open and make his escape in a moment, should circumstances render it necessary.

He then darted to the spot where he had left Mr. Noakes standing.

There he found him, still in the same attitude as when he had left him.

"What do you make of that?" he asked, in a faint whisper.

"Make of it?"

"Yes. The mystery deepens, does it not? But we shall find it all out, rest assured! Come this way!"

Mechanically, as it seemed, Mr. Noakes followed Jonathan for several paces.

Then all of a sudden he seemed to become conscious that they were nearing the house, and, so soon as he made this discovery, he stopped abruptly.

"Why do you pause?" asked Wild.

"Why, surely—surely—"

"Surely what?"

"Surely you cannot be so mad—surely you cannot contemplate returning to that house?"

"Bah!—no more of it! I can't trust you to remain by yourself, therefore you must accompany me; and as for myself, I have determined to see all. So come—refuse at your peril!"

"I do refuse!"

Silently and yet swiftly Jonathan drew his sword from its sheath.

He turned the point in an instant against his companion's breast.

"Refuse again," he cried, "or disobey me in the least, and you die! One thrust, and all will be over! Shall I give it, or shall I not?"

"No—no—no—oh, no!"

"Then come with me, idiot, and be no more trouble! Those men who have just entered will neither capture nor harm us. Unless I am greatly mistaken, they are in a very similar position to what we are ourselves."

CHAPTER DLXXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES WITNESS A STRANGE SPECTACLE IN THE HOUSE TO LET.

HAD Mr. Noakes been less terrified than he was he would probably have been able to come to some conclusion regarding the strange events he had just witnessed.

But the fact was, his mind was wholly and solely occupied by one thought.

That thought, of course, was to fly—to get as far away from all human habitations and human beings as he possibly could.

Therefore, when Jonathan Wild spoke the words which concluded the last chapter, he looked up into his face with a vacant stare.

He could not comprehend by what means Jonathan had arrived at this conclusion.

It seemed to him at first sight very mysterious, and then immediately afterwards he came to the conclusion that the words had only been spoken in order to blind him to his danger.

Jonathan crept gently towards the house, and Mr. Noakes no longer attempted to resist following him.

"Look you!" said Jonathan, at last. "It may be as well to give you a word or two of explanation."

"I don't wish to hear anything."

"But you shall—I insist upon it!" cried Jonathan Wild, who seemed to take a particular pleasure in doing just the reverse to what his comrade wished, and in contradicting

him on every occasion. "I am not such a fool, Noakes, as to thrust myself into unnecessary danger; but still, for all that, I cannot control the curiosity I feel to fathom this matter to the bottom. I am induced to do it because I believe it will turn out to our advantage!"

"But how can it?"

"That I can't explain at present—you must wait and see. How can I tell the exact turn events will take?"

"But is it not madness on your part to dream of entering the house?"

"No, I think not. Why is it so?"

"Because—"

"Because nothing. They don't suspect? Did I not deceive them at the gate?"

"You did—most admirably! You deceived me! I could scarcely believe at first that it was not the old man who had spoken!"

Jonathan grinned for he liked to be flattered for any of his numerous acquisitions.

"I rather think I did manage it pretty well," he said, with a satisfied air, "and that's why I am going to go still further. They are not suspicious."

"But when they enter," said Noakes, "they will find out all."

"No, I think not—I think not!"

"But they must do so!"

"I can't see that, for they will make their way—or I am greatly mistaken in all my calculations—to that room which presented such an extraordinary appearance when we entered it."

"Well, what if they do?"

"Why, can't you see in that case they will avoid that portion of the mansion inhabited by the old people altogether? Rely upon it, they will never suspect what has taken place!"

Mr. Noakes shook his head.

"Not another word!" said Jonathan. "Here we are—we shall soon know now! Listen!"

The door leading into the mansion was now reached.

It had been imperfectly closed, and therefore it was an easy enough matter to push it open a little way and listen.

The faint sound of voices and of receding footsteps struck upon their ears.

"All's well!" said Wild, with a chuckle. "They have not paused to make their way direct to that mysterious apartment."

"And so you will follow?"

"Yes. Cast off your foolish fears; there is no need for terror—believe me there is not!"

Mr. Noakes shook again.

"In this large, dark place we could easily elude pursuit. I shall soon be able to form an idea whether my expectations are likely to be realised; if not, why, we will slip down the stairs at once, mount our horses and ride off."

"Why not now?"

"Do not try my patience too far; be content to listen to my decision! When we do leave this place, we shall be tolerably safe; we have stood long enough to be rested, and long enough to cause our pursuers to give up the chase! Now come, and so soon as you make the least alarm I will run you through the heart with my sword; that's the most silent mode of taking your life that I can think of!"

Noakes shuddered as Wild added, fiercely:

"And I will do it, Noakes—I will do it with as little hesitation or remorse as I should stick my spurs into a horse who refused obedience to the rein!"

These words made a deep impression upon Mr. Noakes. There was no mistaking their import, and he knew his companion well enough to feel quite certain that he was fully in earnest in what he had just said.

Jonathan Wild now stepped forward upon tiptoe, and made an imperative gesture for Noakes to do the same.

Rapidly and yet silently they made their way along the corridor and up the steps to the door of that strange, mysterious room.

The sound of voices and of footsteps had now ceased.

Suddenly, when they were within a few paces of the door, Jonathan stopped as though he had been changed to stone.

He turned icy cold.

"What is it?" whispered Noakes.

"The lights!" he replied. "Curses on my folly, I for-

got that! Do you remember I lighted these candles and never extinguished them?"

"You did. I advised you to do so, but, as usual, you scorned what I said."

"Hush—no matter; there is no alarm at present, or we should hear more. Something unusual has occurred to this strange uncaught band—something which absorbs all their thoughts, and prevents them from taking notice of those circumstances which otherwise would not fail to attract the whole of their attention. Silence!"

Again Jonathan crept forward, and when next he paused it was upon the threshold of that outer room adjoining the mysterious apartment.

Now the murmuring of voices again reached their ears.

After waiting for a moment, Wild said:

"Come, all is well—there is no suspicion yet, they have not noticed anything strange. Quick—a discovery awaits us!"

Either a carpet or some substance resembling it had been spread all over the floor of this outer room, for as they walked across not the least sound followed their footsteps.

The door leading into the inner chamber was standing ajar.

A very feeble light came streaming through it.

Trembling with expectation and curiosity, Jonathan Wild at length paused close to it, and then waited for an instant previous to making the attempt to obtain a glimpse of the interior.

Half-uttered words reached his ears, but from the manner in which they were pronounced he imagined he was in no danger of discovery.

Those within had, at present, no suspicion of the real state of affairs.

Then he ventured to peep round the edge of the door into the inner room.

A sight then met his gaze which for a time completely enchained his attention.

Having been in the darkness for so long, that vast, mysterious chamber seemed to his eyes to be brilliantly lighted up.

But in truth it was only illuminated by the feeble beams of four wax candles—the very four which he had lighted.

The sight which he beheld was, in truth, a strange one, and certainly very different to what he had anticipated.

His conjectures regarding what the strange, heavy object could be that the mysterious strangers were carrying were now completely set at rest.

With their cloaks still muffled closely about them and their felt hats pressed tightly over their heads, the newcomers were standing in an irregular throng round the lower end of the table.

Upon this the heavy object had been.

It had been wrapped in a cloak, and when Jonathan first peeped into the room, one of the strangers was in the very act of throwing this cloak back.

The lifeless body of a man was then disclosed.

He was lying on his back on the large table.

His dress was rich, and the many glittering ornaments upon it sent forth bright scintillations as they caught and reflected the rays of light from the candles overhead.

"A nobleman," said Wild, to himself. "I can tell that by his dress. What does it mean?"

That he was dead was perfectly certain.

The features were white and pinched.

The limbs perfectly rigid.

The eyes glassy, and the lower jaw had fallen.

As the body was uncovered, so did those who stood around uncover their heads as though out of respect for the inanimate clay before them.

Then the one who had thrown back the cloak took hold of the dead man's hand.

"All hope of recovery is at an end," he said, in deep, thrilling tone; "he is dead—quite dead, and no human being has the power to restore him to life."

Several murmurs followed this announcement, and the clothed strangers crowded more closely around the body, as though they wished to take a closer glance at it.

"Then the murderers shall perish!" said another voice.

"They shall—they shall!" murmured the remainder.

"We can tell who has performed this deed, and they shall suffer, and so shall those who set them on. For this we will exact a deep and bitter vengeance!"

"Look your last on him. There, that will do. Now we will consult together as to what had best be done. Come this way."

The speaker drew the cloak over the body, and then, with a slow and heavy tread, walked to the other end of the room.

The others followed and crowded closely around him. A whispered consultation then took place, of which Jonathan Wild was unable to overhear a single syllable.

It was perfectly certain that these men, for some purpose best known to themselves, had chosen the empty house as a place in which to hold secret meetings.

From the manner in which they had walked in and made their way to that particular apartment, it was palpable that they were familiar with the place.

Jonathan would have given much had he been able to recognise the face of the dead man, but he was too far off to see anything distinctly, and, moreover, the strangers had kept close round it.

That the death of this man, whoever he might be, was felt to be a very serious thing by the whole party, there could not be the least doubt, and it was unquestionably owing to the troubled state of their feelings, when they arrived at the mansion that they had not noticed the changed aspect of affairs.

This was sufficiently proved by the fact that they remained unconscious that the lights in the chandeliers were burning when they entered the council chamber, for such it appeared to be.

An oath of disappointment came to Jonathan Wild's lips, and then, giving one parting glance at those who were consulting together in the distance, he turned away.

All this while Mr. Noakes had stood closely by his side, but he had not dared to take one peep.

"Will you look in?" said Wild. "You can look if you wish it; but be quick, for I am going!"

"Going to leave the house?"

"Yes."

"Then I will follow you at once, no matter what is going on within. I don't want to waste time by seeing it."

"Hush—don't speak. Fortunately, those we have seen are at the extremity of that large apartment. Follow me silently!"

Mr. Noakes was only too glad to obey.

In a few moments afterwards the pair again found themselves in the neglected garden.

"Now for our horses!" cried Wild. "The difficulty is to find them. When we have done so we will ride off."

"You will? I can scarcely believe you are in earnest," said Noakes. "How is it you have so suddenly changed your mind?"

"I will explain all presently. Let us find the horses. Curses on my foes! There was a time when such a discovery as I have made to-night would have been worth a fortune to me. Now it is useless—quite useless!"

And as he spoke, Jonathan gnashed his teeth with vexation.

"Oh! would that I was again in my old position! But no matter; even yet, although the probabilities seem so slight, that time may come again. If it does, let them all beware—beware!"

"But the horses!" broke in Mr. Noakes—"but the horses! Where are they? I can't see them!"

He had not paid the least attention to what his companion had said.

CHAPTER DLXXX.

EDGORTH BESS FINDS ANOTHER FRIEND IN THE PERSON OF THE LANDLADY OF THE INN.

"FIND my friends and be happy," murmured Edgworth Bess, repeating the words the waggoner spoke when he bade her farewell. "Alas! I fear there is but little chance of the fulfilment of that wish! What shall I do now?"

Now that the waggoner had gone, she had the room all to herself, but not for long.

Other men came in. Rude, turbulent, noisy, and they terrified her exceedingly.

The landlady, who was really a kind-hearted woman,

noticed the poor girl's distress, and asked her to step into the bar.

Edgworth Bess willingly complied, for she wished to sit down somewhere so that she might have an opportunity of arranging her scattered thoughts and deciding what was the best step for her to take.

That Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, upon discovering her absence, would immediately set out in search of her she felt sure.

In what direction they had gone, how far they were from London, she had no means of ascertaining.

Nor could she in the usual way make any inquiries after either of them, for it was vital to their safety that their identity should be kept a secret.

At first it had been her intention to make her way to the house in Westminster where they had been lodging, but a very little reflection convinced her that this would be a very foolish and injudicious step indeed.

In the first place, Wild junior and his associate had evidently reached London before her.

First of all they would surely make their way to the lodging-house in the belief that she would fly there.

"No, no," she murmured—"I dare not—must not go there, nor even send. That dreadful man is beyond doubt waiting there in anticipation of my arrival. As soon as I presented myself I should be made prisoner, and if so, I should never be allowed another chance of making my escape!"

There was also the suspicion—nay, almost the certainty—that the landlady of this house was an accomplice of Wild junior's.

At any rate, Edgworth Bess felt certain that she could not believe anything this woman might say.

And so the more she pondered the more difficult did her position become.

She tried in vain to hit upon some plan by which she could rejoin her faithful friends.

She greatly felt the need of some kind, sympathising friend, to whom she could confide all her troubles, and upon whose advice she could rely.

Put the more she thought of the complications of her position, the more bewildered did her brain become.

Gradually she felt she was working herself up to a high pitch of intense nervous excitement, that would go far to incapacitate her for doing anything.

The only conclusion that she could arrive at was, that she would request the landlady of the public-house to allow her to stay there during the day.

It was now early in the morning,—that is to say, business in London had not long commenced.

At nightfall, she intended to steal forth, and, favoured by the darkness, commence her search for her two friends.

"Surely," she exclaimed, "when every object is wrapped in darkness, I shall be in less danger of discovery by Wild and his accomplices. Those who would detect me in a moment by daylight would pass me by unnoticed and unsuspected in the night."

The more she reflected upon this decision, the more inclined she felt to adopt it.

The only question was, would the landlady allow her to remain?

She had no money to offer in return, and it was doubtful whether the friendship and good feeling she had for the waggoner would extend to a penniless friend he might bring in with him.

Edgworth Bess trembled as she thought that the landlady might insist upon her quitting the house there and then.

If so, what was she to do? Where was she to turn? Where was she to hide herself from her pertinacious foe?

A refusal, however, would be more endurable than her present state of suspense, and therefore she resolved to put the question to the landlady as soon as she returned.

The poor girl had not long to wait.

"Can you—will you," she said, fixing her eyes appealingly upon the woman's countenance—"will you let me stay here for a little while longer—say till evening? I will not trouble you for anything more than leave to sit in this room, or in some other where I cannot be seen, and where I shall be of no trouble to you."

"Certainly I will," said the landlady. "Do you think I'm a bore constructor?"

This was an unanswerable question, but Edgworth Bess understood that her appeal was granted, and was profuse in her thanks accordingly.

Probably the landlady meant "boa constrictor," and was impressed with the idea that that particular kind of serpent was dead to sympathy and kindness more than any other.

"Never mind, my girl—never mind! Don't be thanking me in such a way for such a trifling matter! Why, I'd do ten times as much for anyone that was a friend of his. Why, we're quite good friends, and have been for many a year; and I shouldn't wonder if we didn't become better acquainted yet."

The landlady gave a peculiar smile as she spoke.

"You shall not sit here," she continued. "The room is a public one, and several people frequently drop in. Look! Come this way! Here's my best private parlour; and you're welcome to sit there, and stay in it, and have what you like to eat and drink as long as you like."

The landlady opened a door, and ushered Edgworth Bess into a small and plainly-furnished apartment.

There was an air of intense neatness over the whole, however; and, to the poor girl who had known so little of the comforts of life, that parlour seemed almost like luxury.

"I wish I could stay and talk with you for awhile," said the landlady, "and cheer your spirits up; but I can't just at present, because this is the busiest part of the day. Presently, however, I shall be less engaged, and then I will come in again. However, in the meanwhile you may, perhaps, be able to amuse yourself with some of these books."

The landlady pointed to a shelf containing about half a dozen volumes.

"They belonged to my dear departed. I keep them in remembrance of him. Ah, dear me, how fond he was of these books, to be sure! He would sit poring over them from morning till night. He was a wonderful reader, and I do believe it was that that killed him!"

"Killed him!" exclaimed Edgworth Bess, in surprise.

"Yes, killed him; for he used to come down in a morning, and, after he had had his breakfast, he would draw a flagon of the oldest and strongest ale in the cellar, light his pipe, sit down in his chair, and read one of those books; and there he would stay all day."

"Can you read?" asked Edgworth Bess.

"No, not I!" replied the landlady, with some disdain.

"I don't want to know how; but as you're young, I suppose you have been taught to read?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, then, I daresay you will be able to amuse yourself. They're wonderful books."

"And yet you have never read them."

"No; but my dear departed used to read them to me—that is, whenever I'd listen to such lies and rubbish! His head was quite full of it. Why, look here, miss, this is a volume he was uncommon fond of."

The landlady took down from the shelf a book that, whatever might be its intrinsic merit, had a very unprepossessing appearance.

The covers were torn off, the back was in a very battered condition and presented numberless threads to view, while every page was dogeared, thumbstained, and in many places marked with beer and other strong drinks.

The margins in many places had been torn away, probably to save the landlord the trouble of reaching a proper spill to light his pipe.

"It isn't much to look at, miss, is it?" said the landlady.

"It's no beauty; but, lor! it wouldn't do to judge by appearances in this world; if we did, why that book would be passed over unnoticed or put on to a fire. It doesn't look fit for anything else, does it?"

Edgworth Bess was fain to admit that the landlady was right.

"Well, then, miss, I can assure you that I have heard my dear departed declare over and over again that that was the very last book that ever he had read, the last of all he had got, and he was so fond of it he used to read it so often that he could almost say it off by heart."

"And did he ever read it to you?"

"Oh yes, many a time, but I never could bear to listen to it; there was ghosts and spectres, and fighting, and haunted castles, and men in armour, and I don't know

what in it—quite enough to frighten any reasonable being to death; but for all that it may amuse you. Here, stop—take it. I am called; I'll run in again presently."

A sharp knocking on the bar counter, showing that some customer was impatient to be served, made the landlady put down the book with great haste and run out.

The description that had been given of the work was by no means an enticing one, and yet Edgworth Bess felt very curious about it.

There must have been something in the volume of an entertaining character she was convinced, or the landlord would never have devoted so much time to the perusal of it.

Despite the uninviting nature of its appearance, Edgworth Bess sat down near the table and drew the volume towards her.

The title-page and some preliminary leaves had been torn away; doubtless there was nothing very entertaining in them, and the landlord had thought he could not find a better use for them than to light his pipe with.

Therefore the first page of the book was before her, and although she turned it over and opened it in many places she was unable to discover what it was called.

This, however, was a point of minor importance, and so she began to read.

As soon as she had turned over the first few pages she began to feel a deep and strong interest in the incidents.

Ere long she became totally unconscious of all surrounding objects, and for a time she forgot her troubles and perplexities as completely as though she had been wrapped in deep, dreamless slumber.

It was a story of an age that was even, then, so long gone by as almost forgotten.

It was a story of a far-off and foreign land—the land above all others of chivalry and romance, and as she perused the glowing accounts of martial deeds she felt the blood tingling in her veins, and when the sufferings of some of the personages of the story were dwelt upon, tears rose quickly and thickly to her eyes, for then she was reminded of her own unhappiness.

Then, again, as she perused these incidents of a wild exciting, supernatural character, she drew her breath in short and fitful inspirations, while her eyes became fixed upon the page.

Time passed by, but she heeded not its flight.

The story began abruptly, and in the following words.

CHAPTER DLXXXI.

EDGWORTH BESS BECOMES DEEPLY INTERESTED IN THE STRANGE STORY OF OLDEN TIMES.

"It was on a cold and stormy December evening, in the beginning of the fourteenth century, and not long after that fortunate period when Peter, surnamed the cruel, was cut off from that life which he had stained with bloodshed, and rapine, and oppression, that a stranger entered a village situated on the banks of the Tagus, near to the eastern extremity of the kingdom of Castile, in Spain.

"He was old, and, though withered, of gigantic stature.

"His large, snow-white beard streamed in the fleeting wind.

"A grey coat, of black baize, was buckled with a leathern belt about his loins.

"He had on his feet sandals instead of shoes, and on his back he carried a large harp; while a long staff, ornamented on the top with a cross, sustained his wearied steps.

"He stopped at the door of the first neat-looking cottage that presented itself, and asked whether they would grant him lodging for a night.

"He was answered in the affirmative, and requested to walk in.

"Being seated, at the desire of the people of the house, he told them that he wanted not only lodging for the night, but food also; and apprised them at the same time that he had nothing to offer them in return but his prayers and a tune upon his harp.

"Your prayers are earnestly desired," replied a young man; "but other return we shall not nor should we accept. Even your harp, whatever delight it might afford us, shall remain untouched if offered in way of compensation for any little accommodation our poor hut can bestow."

"A feeble suffusion of red bespeaking something more than gratitude overspread the aged face of the pilgrim.

"He laid his hands upon his breast and bowed his head in acknowledgment, then sighed and said, while his words seemed struggling for a passage:

"He that inspires your heart, good youth, with the true spirit of beneficence will give you the reward for it!"

"The table was then spread with the best provisions which the cottage afforded, and the whole family, consisting of the young man already mentioned, his wife, an old man his father, and his children, sat down with the stranger to a frugal but wholesome supper.

"A pitcher of tolerable wine concluded the repast, the young man earnestly pressing the old guest to drink.

"The enlivening notes of hospitality, and the unaffected cheerfulness and good-nature of the cottagers, insensibly relaxed the austerity of the old pilgrim and warmed him into conversation.

"He listened with pleasure to the simple details of rustic enjoyment and the artless acknowledgments of domestic bliss.

"At length he spoke.

"Happy," he said—"most happy is thy lot, if there be happiness found on earth, and you have the wisdom to understand it. You have greater riches than are to be found in the palaces of princes or the stately homes of the affluent. I remember the time, indeed, when the castle of a nobleman or the arm of a knight was a never-failing refuge for distress, in whatever garb distress appeared; and when the proud turrets of the nobility burst upon the sight of the oppressed or unfortunate like the first beams of the orient sun on the eye of the night-strayed traveller, cheering, and enlivening, and diffusing hope and joy. Then reigned over this happy country Alphonso the wise, the valiant and the good; but now, at every gate, savage inhospitality, with stern denial, madly opposes the entrance of the poor, and chills the woeborn heart of misery, but crouches and basely bends the servile knee of respect to the pampered knave of fortune. From such, let my steps be turned for ever."

"Ah, father!" interrupted the young man. "Pardon the presumption of ye! zealous zeal, which thus ventures to break in on your discourse! But little should I merit your good opinion if I suffered you uninformed to say that now which to-morrow's setting sun should see you retract. To-morrow you shall see a man—"

"What man?" interrupted the pilgrim, warmly.

"The husband of the widow, the father of the orphan, the never-failing resource of distress—humble, though wealthy—gentle, though valiant."

"Young man, your youthful heart, impressed with some partial act of generosity—some unimportant benefit, rendered, perhaps, in a moment of capricious virtue,—overflows with a gratitude which blinds you—a gratitude which speaks more for you than for the object of it. Generous yourself, you overrate the favours conferred upon you by others. This is an error, but, I confess, an amiable one, and no uncertain pledge of a worthy heart. But who is this man—this very singular character of whom you speak?"

"Here every mouth involuntarily opened, and at the same instant pronounced:

"Don Isidore!"

"Don Isidore? Who—what Don Isidore?" impatiently inquired the pilgrim.

"Don Isidore de Haro," returned the host.

"Don Isidore de Haro? Good Heavens! Young man, recollect yourself—say what Don Isidore de Haro! Is he a native of this country, or how long has he lived in it?"

"As to his native country, I cannot say anything with certainty," returned the young man, "but I believe he is a Castilian by birth. He has been here but a short time, yet in that short time has gained the affections of all ranks of people."

"At this point the old man of the cottage took up the account.

"It is only two years," he said, "since Don Isidore came here to take possession of the castle and estate of Querro, which he honourably obtained from the affection of our good King, as a reward for his services. Where he came from I know not, but I have heard that he was all his life before in the wars."

"The pilgrim rose suddenly from his seat, took two or three hasty strides across the room, sighed bitterly, then again seating himself down, seemed wrapped in medita-

tions, while the whole family, struck with astonishment at his evident perturbation, remained silent.

At length, somewhat recovering himself, he said:

"Pardon, good people, the emotions occasioned by the sudden recollection of some passages of a life strangely chequered with the vicissitudes of fortune; but this Don Isidore de Haro is, then, a good man, you say. Though rich, is he married?"

"He was married, but his lady had been dead some time before his coming here. His domestics say that sorrow for her death has driven him to this retired life. His grief seems unaltered and undiminished by time, though it is said that he was at first quite sore and calm under it."

"Has he no children?"

"Yes—two. The young gentleman named Alphonso, his eldest, is now about fourteen years of age."

"Alphonso? Has he indeed a son named Alphonso?"

"He has—the noblest youth that lives. I have the honour to be employed by Don Isidore as one of his instructors."

"Then you are a scholar?"

"Thank Providence, I am not entirely ignorant of letters; but by no means such a scholar as to instruct that young gentleman in letters. Father Thomas, who lives at the castle, does that, but I teach and practise him in some athletic exercises, for you must know that there is not one acquirement necessary to a soldier or becoming a gentleman in which he is not instructed, nor is there a youth of some years older than him in the country that can equal him at any of them; besides, he is reckoned a most accomplished scholar for his age; and, as to his person, you will judge of that when you see it. I will not pretend to describe it."

"Donna I bella, the daughter," he continued, "is about eight years old, they say, but has been ever since her mother's death with the sister of Don Isidore, who is married to a nobleman in the Court of Portugal, and it is said by the domestics that she is a child of unequalled beauty, and that as Don Alphonso shows in every motion the spirit and figure of Don Isidore, so Donna Isabella every day discloses more and more the delicate lustre of beauty and excellent temper of her deceased mother."

"Don Isidore, then, must be happy," cried the pilgrim. "Blessed with wealth, power, children such as you describe, and, above all, with the well-merited affections of his vassals and dependants, he must approach as near to happiness as the state of mortality will allow."

"Some say not," replied the peasant. "Those who have the constant opportunity of observing him remark that he labours under some hidden melancholy; indeed, all allow that he has never been the same since the death of his lady; and were it not for the amusement he finds in the instruction of his son, the employment of his mind in contriving and executing acts of beneficence, and in the conversation of the good Father Thomas, it is thought that he must sink beneath the weight of his afflictions. Indeed, Father Thomas is a most excellent man, for, besides his extraordinary piety, he is extremely charitable, and as a preacher and pastor is unequalled. But to-morrow you will see them all. Don Isidore will expect you. No one, whatever his condition may be, passes without calling at the castle, and it is a part of Alphonso's business to watch lest they should accidentally pass by, and to bring them home with him, from whence they generally carry away a good supply of clothes and food. Now, I doubt not that, while we are indulging ourselves here with the enjoyment of your company, we may run the hazard of disobliging Don Isidore by not having conducted you to him at first."

"Little more passed that night.

"The fatigues of the day called upon the old stranger to retire to his room, and the cottagers were by timely repose to prepare for the labours of the ensuing day."

CHAPTER DLXXXII.

EDGORTH BESS CONTINUES THE PERUSAL OF THE STRANGE STORY OF OLDEN TIME.

"NEXT morning the pilgrim, after having bestowed on his hosts a hearty benediction and his thanks for their hospitable shelter, took his leave and proceeded on his way towards the castle of Querro.

"It was little more than a quarter of a league from the cottage to the avenue, and as he walked very slowly, deeply immersed in thought, the day was advanced when he got to the gate of it.

"Here, seeing that the mansion was at a distance little short of that which he had already come, he sat himself down upon a large stone bench, in order to rest himself, and discuss at leisure the variety of subjects which occupied his thoughts upon the discourse of the preceding night.

"He had not seated himself long before he perceived a number of boys running towards him with the speed of a flock of frightened deer.

"One outstripped the rest, and leaving them far behind, reached the stranger before he had time to form a conjecture upon the nobility of his appearance.

"If the old man was surprised at the swiftness of his pace, he was astonished at his personal appearance, and still more at his address.

"The full, muscular form of his limbs, and the large size of his bones, with a stature gigantic for his age, gave a proportionate share of strength.

"His face, in which manly fire, dignity, and sensibility were blended, glowed with the colours of health and exercise, while an air, at once majestic and insinuating, diffused a charm over the whole that operated like a spell upon the beholder.

"Addressing the old man with a mixture of respect, admiration, and pity, he said:

"I hope, senor, you have not been long sitting in this place so unworthy your reverend appearance and years! Should it be so, I shall have to accuse myself of an unpardonable neglect, for which I should certainly receive a severe reproof from Don Isidore. Do, senor, get up. I will lead you to a place where you shall refresh yourself with food and repose, and where you will meet with a hearty reception. Here!"

"He reached forth his hand to the pilgrim, who, grasping it in a mixed ecstacy of transport and amazement, snatched it hastily to his lips, and bedewed it with tears of affection.

"His utterance was choked in a tumult of feeling, and he walked slowly along, his young guide holding him by one of his fingers, which he had caught in his rapture, and still retained with a firm grasp; while the other boys, who had come up one after the other, surrounded them, gazing alternately at the beard, the dress, and harp which hung at the back of the pilgrim.

"Is Don Isidore at the castle?" inquired the old man, as they proceeded.

"No, senor; he has been abroad for some days; but all the servants have directions to obey punctually my orders in my father's absence; and you shall be well treated, although he is not at home. To be sure, he will be greatly delighted on his return, which is now hourly expected, to find you here, for nothing gives him so much pleasure as the company of strangers. At the furthest, he will certainly be back to-morrow. In the meantime, whenever my talk wearies you, Father Thomas will keep you in conversation more entertaining, as well as more suitable to the gravity of your years."

"At length they arrived at the gate of the castle.

"On its being opened, the stranger was surprised to find himself saluted with as much respect as if he had been a prince by the keeper, who emphatically pronounced:

"Welcome, stranger, whoever thou art—welcome to the Castle of Querro!"

"The old man felt sensations to which he had long been a stranger.

"As they passed through the court-yard they were accosted by a servant, who said:

"Don Alphonso, the horses are ready!"

"Very good, Pierot," replied the youth, "I will but introduce this stranger to Father Thomas and attend directly."

"Upon which the pilgrim, turning to his young friend, said:

"Do not, I pray, allow me to be the means of detaining you from your pleasures! Though the days of youth are past with me, I well remember the painfulness of restraint, and I already feel too great an interest in your heart to run the hazard of losing any share of it by taxing your kindness too severely!"

"Indeed," returned the youth, "the delight I feel in

attending you would more than compensate for the loss of any pleasure. The servant who just now spoke came to call me to my riding-master,—riding is part of my daily exercise, but attending you is a duty much more material in itself, and much more productive of pleasure to me."

"Having brought his guest into the house, Alphonso led him into the great hall, placed him in the chair, and gave orders that immediate preparation should be made for his accommodation and refreshment, and sent also for Father Thomas.

"Upon the entrance of the latter, Alphonso sprang across the hall, took him by the hand, and led him over to the old man, who immediately rose, bent his aged knees, and besought his blessing, which the old man bestowed upon him, raising him at the same time from the ground and replacing him in the great chair.

"Father Thomas then seated himself, and, having surveyed the stranger with an earnest and scrutinising eye, sighed and pressed the hand of Alphonso with a warmth expressive of approbation.

"Then, addressing himself to the aged pilgrim, he said:

"Have you travelled far this morning, senor?"

"Only from the adjoining village," returned the old man, "where I was treated with a cheerfulness and hospitality that would charm the stubborn heart of misanthropy itself, by a young man, who said, if I am not mistaken, that he was one of this young gentleman's preceptors."

"It is Juanico!" cried Alphonso, in rapture. "If Juanico was able, he would be as generous as the first nobleman in Spain."

"Alphonso left the stranger and Father Thomas in discourse, while he attended to his duty in the menage. When that was despatched, he impatiently returned, and found he had finished his breakfast.

"He employed the whole day in showing him the gardens, woods, vineyards, and castle.

"The armoury particularly attracted the old man's attention. He looked with an eye of skilful curiosity at every part.

"Do you not wish," he said to Alphonso, "to be able to wear those?"

"I do very much," returned the youth; "nay, I am pretty sure that I am able even now, for I can run with the stoutest youth you saw with me on my back against Justico, who entertained you in the village, and I am sure the lad I carry is twice as heavy as one of these."

"Then why do you not try?"

"I am afraid," replied Alphonso, "that Don Isidore would suspect me of vanity, and I know there is nothing he hates so much as that."

"My noble child," cried the pilgrim, "modesty like yours should not go unrewarded, and if Don Isidore will deign to pay any attention to a poor man like myself, you shall on his return have a trial."

"Ah, sir," returned Alphonso, "my father regards the poor as much as the rich, when he finds them honest and brave. But surely you are not a poor man! I take you to be a very rich man!"

"An indescribable sensation thrilled to the pilgrim's heart.

"He seized Alphonso in his arms, held him for some time clasped in his embrace, and wept.

"Alphonso wept too. Why, he could not tell; his young heart was agitated with unaccustomed sensations of delight, and he smiled through his tears. The lustre of natural majesty broke through the sable weeds that veiled it, and the dignified mind of the youth, in estimating the worth of his fellow-creature, laid no account on that of his clothes.

"Next morning, while Alphonso and his new friend were engaged in the armoury, the trampling of horses announced the arrival of Don Isidore.

"Father Thomas met, and retired with him into his closet.

"As soon as permission was granted him, Alphonso flew to embrace his father.

"When the mutual manifestations of affection were over, Alphonso announced the presence of the pilgrim in the castle.

"I have been told all by Father Thomas, replied Don Isidore. 'I entirely approve of your behaviour to him,



[EDGORTH BESS IS DEEPLY INTERESTED IN THE TATTERED VOLUME.]

and thank you for so very honourably representing me in my absence. I am the more pleased with your attention to him because he is so very poor a man.

"'Poor?' repeated Alphonso. 'Surely, father, you mistake? He is not poor. I never saw a grander man in my life!'

"Do not depreciate your own charity," replied Father Thomas. "You cannot but have observed the extreme poverty of his dress?"

"His dress? No, indeed!" said Alphonso. "I took no notice of his dress! If it be poor, as you say, I am sure I am sorry for it, for I cannot help loving him."

"Then, turning to Don Isidore, he added:

"I respect him as much—almost as much—as yourself. Then he has such a commanding air, and he talks so grandly of war, and honour, and courage, and armour, that I am sure he would delight you!"

"What Alphonso says is not without foundation," observed Father Thomas.

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"Well, then," said Don Isidore, "tell your friend that I kiss his hands, and shall be glad to see him by-and-by in the great hall."

"He is there now," said Alphonso—"I can hear the sound of his harp."

"Then let us go to him."

"Upon entering the hall, the old man rose, and, with a deportment majestic beyond expression, saluted Don Isidore, who, on his part, received him not with that arrogant affectation of humility which mortifies more than any other exercise of pride, but with that unfeigned condescension which made every benefit he conferred valued less for the magnitude of the gift than the truthfulness of the giver."

"In truth, he felt in the present case a veneration, if not awe, imposed upon him by the figure before him."

"I will not," said the old man, "do so much injustice to the character of Don Isidore de Haro as to suppose that the footing on which he finds a person of my own

humble appearance in his castle will subject Don Alphonso to the imputation of rashness, or me to the censure of forward intrusion. Don Isidore may be sure that the kindness of the youth, flattering though it was, should not have been accepted, had not universal report persuaded me that it would have been approved of by his father.

"Venerable senor," returned Don Isidore, "I hope you will find that your opinion, and the report which gives it birth are not entirely misplaced. My boy, whose whole life has been one continual series of acts the most grateful to my feelings, has never done one of more satisfaction to me than procuring me the honour of your company. I am not," he continued, "a man of much ceremony, and shall therefore only tell you that my guests are to all intents of hospitality masters of this castle, and I beg that you will consider yourself so. Do me the favour to take your seat, and I will again wait upon you as soon as I have given some necessary orders."

"When Don Isidore retired to his apartment he could not help reflecting on the extraordinary appearance of the stranger."

"Pilgrims and itinerant bards he had often seen, but never one that at all resembled this, in whom he imagined he could distinguish remains of the warrior, and the defaced ruins of the man of dignity."

"That he was of a rank far above his present seeming he had not the smallest doubt."

"But what that rank had been, or how he had fallen from it, he could not conceive, and feared to inquire."

"Even conjecture was lost in the wide field of calamitous events."

"While he was immersed in this confusion of thoughts, Alphonso entered."

"There is something, my child," said Don Isidore, "in this old veteran's manner which exacts more than common respect, and bespeaks him of superior rank, though fallen. I confess an invincible curiosity to know who and what he is, but as the recollection of such things must be painful, I will rather content myself with ignorance of the matter, than indulge my curiosity at the risk of giving a single pang to his aged heart. I will therefore be silent on the subject, unless he chooses of his own accord to disclose himself to me. At all events, the great hall is a place where the difficulty he may have to be communicative must be increased by the frequent entrance of servants. Therefore I wish you to inform him that I shall be obliged to him for his company in my closet. It is no idle curiosity which I feel, but an anxious desire to heal, if possible, the wounds that fortune may have inflicted on him."

"Alphonso quickly returned with the old pilgrim."

"Don Isidore was surprised at perceiving that he had brought his harp with him."

"Being seated at the desire of Don Isidore, he proceeded, without a word, to tune his harp, while his face exhibited marks of strong emotions, and seemed pregnant with extraordinary events."

"Don Isidore would not break in upon him."

"After a short prelude, he began to play, accompanying it with his voice."

"Melancholy set her stamp on every note he sang."

"Don Isidore, who heedfully attended to catch from his verses a clue to his woes, was for a time all ear."

"He sung of fortune and fame, and rank, of friends, of children lost, and of the miseries of an unconnected, isolated existence here."

"Then he sung of war, till his harp, seeming to catch the enthusiasm of its master, struck such martial sounds as roused the blood of Don Isidore, and filled the young Alphonso with an ardour he was before a stranger to."

Hence he skillfully turned to the happy state of Don Isidore, whose armour hung up at once a monument of its owner's former prowess, and present peaceful honours, and a lesson of emulation to the rising spirit of his son."

"At this point Don Isidore fixed his eyes upon the old pilgrim, whose face, glowing with the awakened enthusiasm of his spirit, beamed with the glories of the warrior and of the bard."

"In mute amazement he for awhile gazed, tracing the lineaments of a countenance familiar to him, yet unknown."

"Thrice he essayed to speak, but, lost in surmise, astonishment, and doubt, as often faltered."

"At length, with difficulty mastering the tumult within him, he said:

"Ah, sire, am I mistaken, or do I behold—do I see the once beloved, and ever-revered—the glorious——"

"Unfortunate Baron de Rayo!"

"Don Isidore had barely strength sufficient to rise and throw his arms about the Baron's neck."

"At length, his great heart finding vent, he exclaimed:

"How—how is this? Alas—alas! Do I live to see this day?—the great Baron de Rayo—the glorious and the good—the plume of science—the thunderbolt of war? Do I live to see him thus?—do I live to see my first friend—my early director—he whose instructions and example first called my youthful spirit forth—pointed out the path to glory, and led the way to deeds of piety and virtue—divested of his honours and distinctions, travelling unattended—unconnected—like a minstrel through the country? Why—why is this? Penance it cannot be, for your soul was as incapable of guilt, as thy spirit of dishonour! So then, my friend—my parent—how comes this to pass? And why is this transport which I feel at thus finding you restored, as it were, from the dead, equiposed by the anguish of seeing you thus fallen? Say, too, what of Gonzalvo, the companion of my youthful days?"

"All this while Alphonso stood gazing from one to the other in mute surprise."

"Don Isidore," said the baron, "whatever my griefs may be, I have yet room left in my bosom for a large portion of joy to see you once more, and to see you so happy."

"Here Don Isidore shook his head."

"I say again happy," continued the Baron. "The human, prone to discontent, will, if it lack real cause of misery, forge for itself stings and arrows out of the best benefits of life. You have had your afflictions, and I have had some conception of them; but by the time you have heard my tale, you will allow that all the sorrows you have suffered were joys compared to mine. But as for your son, let him go—let him leave us together. His heart, unused to aught but happiness, shrinks at the bare suggestion of our woes. Let us spare a recital which would only shock his gentle nature, and serve no purpose of instructor or utility."

"In compliance with this request, Alphonso took his leave; and as soon as he was gone, the baron said:

"It is an old observation, conceived in wisdom, and founded on experience, that wherever there is flattery, there is a fool and a knave in the case. I, for my part, think better of both of us than to offer flattery, or to expect it to be received. I shall therefore frankly declare that in that youth who has now left us Don Isidore possesses a treasure more than equivalent for all the losses of his life. Why it is I know not; but it is certainly a truth that from the instant I beheld him I felt myself so tied to him by the strongest cords of affection that to separate him from me would be to tear every ligament of my heart asunder. But I delay my promised history, and much I fear that the pain some passages of it cannot fail to give you will be but poorly requited by the gratification of your curiosity."

CHAPTER DLXXXIII.

EDGORTH BESS FINDS THE STRANGE STORY INCREASE IN EXCITEMENT AND INTEREST.

"ALPHONSO, BARON DE RAYO, as you well know, was of no mean distinction. His castle was as strong, his wealth as great, his vassals as numerous as any of his peers in the kingdom of Castile. His renown in war, and favour with his prince, not less the topic of admiration with the nation at large than the subject of envy of his enemies."

"His fortunes seemed founded on a rock, and his honours and domestic circumstances to bid defiance to the storms of adversity."

"Such they were when last we parted."

"Heaven had spared me one daughter, the only remaining child of a numerous progeny. The rest followed their mother to the grave ere they had passed the years of infancy."

"This and more you already know, but as it makes a link in the great chain of events I propose to relate, I choose to be circumstantial, even though it should render me tedious"

"In the possession of that daughter I buried the remembrance of all my losses, and having no son, and being determined never to marry again, I adopted the son of my sister, the young Henry Gonzalvo, reared him as my own, and hoped by my influence with the King to get the title and honours of the old house of Rayo entailed upon him. And as at this time your father—a younger brother of a respectable branch of our house—bespoke my patronage for you, I took you to my castle, and, fancying that I saw in you the dawns of future greatness, determined to train you early up to arms. Your progress and unfolding powers justified my hopes; nor can I recollect many passages of my life that pleased me more than beholding in the brotherly contests of emulation between you and my Henry. The victory hung now on this side, now on that, till both were exhausted; for so perfect was the equality between you at the close of ten years—which you continued together under my eye—that it remained doubtful which excelled in vigour, dexterity, and martial ardour, or which in tenderness, fidelity, and mutual attachment.

"I looked upon you both with pride—with hope—and flattered myself that in each I saw a second self arising. But what was my exultation when, our glorious King Alphonso calling me to the war against the Moors, I brought you both with me, and found that your actions exceeded my most sanguine expectations?

"The King, you know, on the taking of Algerjiras, honoured you with a knighthood, and gratified my fond wish by entailing the family honours on Henry Gonzalvo.

"When our most beloved monarch died, at the siege of the Moorish fort of Gibraltar, I retired in despondence and grief, and brought Gonzalvo with me; while you, arrested by a thirst for glory, and disdaining a life of inactive dependence, remained behind.

"We returned—Henry loaded with honours, and I exulting in the reflection that the reputation of our family for celebrity in the field, and distinguished for valour and loyalty, was likely to suffer no diminution in the hands of its new representative.

"We had not been long at home, when I had the additional satisfaction of perceiving an event ripening which I had from the first anxiously desired, and which alone was wanting to give full completion to all the wishes or views I had on earth. In short, I perceived that a reciprocal affection was growing apace in the bosoms of Gonzalvo and my daughter, and, being determined neither, on the one hand, to injure their love by anticipated concurrence, nor, on the other, to throw any obstacle in their way by too vigilant observation, I gave the young couple just as much time for uninterrupted communication as I thought would serve to strengthen their flame without consuming their affection.

"Everything turned out according to my intentions. Henry, fearful of the event, retired to his father's house, and from thence gave me by letter a disclosure of his passion, with many expressions of apprehension, and, above all, deprecating my suspicions of perfidy and breach of hospitality in having paid his addresses privately to my daughter.

"I ascertained from my daughter that she returned his love, and gave my consent to their union.

"At this period Peter called forth all his forces to crush a confederacy formed against him by some discontented nobles, at the head of which were his mother and his half-brother.

"Peter was the legitimate son of our lamented King Alphonso, and I thought it was my duty to defend him without examining the merits of his case. Gonzalvo and I accordingly set out to join the royal standard.

"I will not enlarge upon the disgust the tyrant's whole conduct gave us. It, however, served to lessen, if not entirely remove, the regret at finding that you had long been a follower of Henry, Count Transtamare, his brother. You were right, as it turned out; but I acted upon principles of loyalty and allegiance, and found my consolation in the consciousness of intentional rectitude.

"To be succinct, we overcame the rebellion, and Gonzalvo and I returned to our peaceful castle with no other reward or compensation for our pains than the laurels we gathered on the field, which, under such banners as we fought beneath, were withered ere they could be plucked.

"Immediately on our return, the nuptials of my chil-

dren were celebrated with all the pomp and dignity becoming their illustrious house, and my happiness was in due time increased by the birth of a son.

"The child was scarcely ever from my sight. I hung in raptures over him.

"A short time after this, Peter again called us forth. His reiterated breaches of faith, his cruelties and exactions, raised up against him a formidable power, headed by Count Transtamare, assisted by the renowned Bertrand Guesclin. I thought it our duty to attend him; nor could we, however willing at such a time to remain at home, decline the summons without tarnishing, or at least hazarding, our fame. We therefore prepared to depart, and the young child—who was named after me, Alphonso—was put out to nurse in a neighbouring village near the castle, my daughter being determined to attend her husband to Cordova. From this resolution, however extraordinary, nothing could dissuade her, and, everything being done that could render the journey convenient to her, we set out, and, without any incident worthy of relation, arrived at Cordova, which, to our astonishment, we found invested by Peter, his enormities having driven the inhabitants to the desperate measure of declaring openly against him.

"We were treated with every mark of distinction by all, and the singular heroism and conjugal affection of Maria raised her so high in everyone's esteem, and gained her such universal respect, that her condition was rendered much more tolerable than we could possibly have hoped for.

"Among those who were most forward in doing honour to our family was the Marquess de Punalada, a man of an illustrious house, and high in favour with the King. He had formerly been acquainted with Gonzalvo, and now renewed his intimacy with a zeal that gave us the more pleasure as the capricious and violent temper of the King made the condition of those who were not favourites, either immediately or collaterally, extremely precarious and disagreeable.

"We had little time for the cultivation of this intimacy.

"Henry was ordered off on a service of considerable danger and difficulty. I was ordered, together with all the older barons, to remain with the army at the siege, in order that the King might avail himself of our counsels, while Maria retired with the Countess of Dalmadao to the city of Ecceja, to wait the return of her husband.

"I shall not interrupt the thread of my story with a detail of the operations of the army, which, perhaps, you already know as well as I, but tell you that here I was informed that you had perished with the other adherents of Count Transtamare, with whom the tyrant broke faith so wickedly at Toledo.

"Something, no doubt the stings of a guilty conscience, fretted Peter, and inwardly preyed upon him. Naturally ill-disposed, he grew daily worse, and the noble loyalty of his subjects never was put to so severe a trial as in adhering to the cause of that weak, worthless tyrant.

"For a considerable time I had heard nothing from Gonzalvo or my daughter. I began to feel an uneasiness unusual to me at a neglect for which I was utterly unable to account, when one day I was put under arrest and hurried before the King.

"Unconscious of having committed any offence to merit such a gross indignity, I was busied in forming conjectures on the strange event, when, in going through the camp to the King's pavilion, I heard a herald proclaim my son, Henry Gonzalvo, a traitor.

"More at a loss than before, I dismissed the inquiry into the causes from my mind, and only looked to the consequences, which I determined to endure with that unshaken fortitude and dignity that became a noble Castilian.

"Arrived at the royal pavilion, I found Peter seated on his throne, a number of the nobility around him, and, as usual, the Marquess de Punalada at his right hand in conference with him, while his face appeared convulsed with a conflict of all the horrid passions that shake human nature struggling for the mastery of his soul.

"Perceiving me, he turned abruptly from the Marquess de Punalada, and, addressing himself to me, sternly said:

"When foul rebellion stains the branch of a family, and well-founded suspicion falls upon the chief stock, what reparation does justice to an injured monarch demand?—

what measures do his security require? Say, Baron de Rayo. I speak to you.'

"When treason or disloyalty is proved against the house of Rayo, my liege lord," I returned, "I will be the first to pronounce a sentence of severest rigour, and call the execution of it justice."

"That base dissimulation," interrupted Peter, furiously, "which, under the plausible pretext of rigour and an affected zeal for justice, assumes the garb of innocence, but marks more strongly the deep-laid treachery of your views, and bids us but the more beware of danger."

"None," I answered, "but the disloyal and treacherous ever found an enemy in, or had cause to fear danger from, our house; and who but your Majesty dares accuse us of it? Let the villain slanderer—be he who he may—come forth, and my life shall be the pledge that I refute the calumny—and sure no common calumniator it must be who could shake that confidence which long and faithful services of ages had justly entitled the family of Rayo to claim from the Crown of Castile."

"Dost thou, then, dissembler as thou art," interrupted the King, "pretend ignorance? Why fled thy rebel son and joined the cause of Traustamare? Knowest thou nought of this—or wilt thou presume to say that he who knew no thought but thine, who moved but by thy guidance, and yielded to no impulse but the impulse of thy spirit, should have taken such a step without thy knowledge and concurrence? Thy nephew, too, preceded him in his rebellion, but he has paid the forfeit of his crime, and so shalt thou. We will show the proud Rayo that to offend us is some danger, and that as we raised so we can lay his honours in the dust."

"Gracious heaven! what was my indignation. Rage for some time deprived me of speech, almost of sense."

"After some pause, I rallied my scattered senses."

"The honours of Rayo," said I, "your Majesty has neither raised nor can extinguish. This body, it is true, is in your power, and must endure every outrage that jealous tyranny may choose to inflict upon it; but the honours of myself and family shall mock thy threatened rage even beyond the reach of thy power of revenge, and gain new vigour from the strokes of persecution."

"Mark," cried Peter, furious with passion—"mark ye, my lords, the recant defines us! Take him from our sight, and hurry him straight to prison!"

"Yet, ere I go," said I, "let me, in presence of these noble barons, exculpate myself from a charge the barest thoughts of which raise in my soul scorn, abhorrence, and indignation."

"Here my feelings, like a torrent suddenly contracted, overbore my reason, and I added:

"Disclaiming all attachment and respect to him who wrongs me and aims a deadly blow at all my well-earned honours, I declare that merely to satisfy my peers I stoop to this vindication. Though Peter may have his own reasons for doubting the allegiance of his subjects, the virtue of Rayo may shield me from the charge of dissimulation."

"I then turned to the knights and nobles, Peter—weak, wicked creature—biting his lips with internal agitation."

"My lord," said I, "why my son has disappeared I cannot conjecture, nor did I know of that event (if it has taken place, which I yet doubt) till I came into this presence. That he has gone over to the arms of our adversaries I cannot believe, as I know that his allegiance to the throne was equal to my own. Over this some strange mystery hangs—a mystery which that God who sees and knows the inmost recesses of the heart, bears me witness that I am utterly unable to pierce, yet still I cannot believe that he would go and leave his wife a hostage, for sure he left her and—"

"Mark the subtle traitor," said the King. "He would insinuate that he knew nothing of his daughter's flight!"

"My daughter," I exclaimed—"is it possible? What new wonders are yet for me to hear? what new mysteries to be unfolded?"

"The barons seemed struck with my emotion."

"Yet, my lords," rejoined I, "let me turn to my own conduct, and show that I am abused. At the time that this war broke out, and the King called upon his people to rise to arms, my years might have exempted me, without imputation, from the service of war. Grown grey in the service of successive kings, dignified with honours, and covered with the rewards of a monarch who knew how to estimate my service, I might have stayed at home and

enjoyed the repose necessary to my years. Did I, then, come forth in my old age to tarnish all the glories of a well-spent life—act the base dissembler's part, and play the hoary fool? I ask you, my lords, is it possible? Yet am I—without proof, inquiry, or even a full knowledge of the charge against me—treated as a criminal—a criminal against myself, my fortunes, and my fame. Observe, my lords, how this story hangs together. If we had determined on the project of which we stand accused, what hindered us from executing it in a manner and at a time more suitable to our views? Why delay the desertion to that time and place which alone could render it hazardous? Why should I be left behind? The cloud of mystery which hangs over it disqualifies me from speaking as I would, but my part must appear plain, and manifestly innocent. And, as for my son, I pledge my life for his fidelity."

"Here the King broke off my discourse, and, rising furiously, ordered me into confinement."

"I was hurried out of the pavilion, and the next day was conducted under a strong guard, and lodged a close and solitary prisoner in a cell in the tower of Liguena."

"For a long time I was utterly incapable of reflection or of entering into an investigation of this unaccountable turn in our affairs. All within was wild chaos, confusion, and uproar."

"Time at length began to calm the perturbation of my mind, and the tumult within gradually subsided into deliberation."

"I found myself, however, as much at a loss as before."

"In vain I turned over every incident in my mind that could, by forced possibility, have given rise to the error. All seemed very strange, unaccountable, and inexplicable the more it was examined, and I had at length nothing left to think, but that my children, by some means which I could not develop, had been sacrificed to fraud and the subtle designs of some hidden enemies, envious perhaps of the honours of our house."

"Oh! my children," I would exclaim, "do you still live, or has the ruffian hand of barbarous power assailed your precious lives? If it be so, give the guilty to the vengeance of these arms, old and withered though they be."

"Thus, day after day, month after month, elapsed, having no diversity of incidents to chequer existence. I had no objects by which to measure time, and was uncertain what number of years I passed in that dreary mansion."

"Losing all hope of revisiting the world, I almost lost all desire too, and had laid my account with ending my days in that dismal prison, when one night I was visited by a dream or a vision, and to this hour I cannot determine which."

"Methought, as I lay in bed, Gonzalvo called to me."

"I looked up and beheld him, pale, emaciated, with every appearance of wildness and distraction in his face and air. I looked at him and wept; then stretched forth my hands to embrace him. He eluded my endeavour."

"Alas! my son," I said, "after so long an absence, is it denied to me to—"

"Sire," said he, interrupting me, "it availeth not. Depart you hence, and seek my lost child."

"I essayed to speak, but could not; I endeavoured to call him—he baffled all my efforts, and vanished, leaving me in an agony of consternation and grief."

"Next morning the impression of this phantom was so strong upon my senses that I was almost at a loss to determine whether it was a reality or a dream. While I was in a train of contemplation, the keeper entered my chamber."

"I asked him whether anyone had been admitted to me in the night."

"He said not, but at the same time informed me that he had that morning received orders to discharge from confinement all persons imprisoned there, Peter the Cruel being dead, and Henry Count Transtamare, who killed the tyrant, having succeeded to the throne."

"The coincidence of the dream with this my deliverance made an impression on me difficult to conceive and impossible to be described."

"I thought I saw the finger of Providence pointing out the way to some strange and momentous revelation."

"The tumult of my feelings—surprise, joy, astonish-

ment, and suspense—was more than my enfeebled state could support.

"I was scarcely able to move, and for some days was unable to leave Liguena. When at length I was able, I was at a loss which way to go, but at last determined to seek the Marquess de Punalada, of whose friendship for Gonzalvo I entertained no doubt, and who would therefore be most likely to give me information of his fate.

"With weary steps I reached the city of Burgos. There I had the mortification to hear that my estates were confiscated and my blood attainted, and was, moreover, told that the marquess had quitted Court and retired to his estate in Andalusia long before the death of Peter.

"Thither, feeble and exhausted though I was, I repaired.

"After a long, wretched, and fatiguing journey, I reached a village near his castle, and was told that he then, and mostly, resided on his estate on the banks of the river Ebro.

"I was surprised at this intelligence, which nevertheless was sufficiently confirmed by the people of the village.

"I determined to find him.

"So, recommending myself to the Almighty, and beseeching him to endue me with strength and patience, I again turned my back on Andalusia.

"Not being able to travel in the state suitable to my rank, the little means I possessed being just exhausted, and, moreover, recollecting that it might be prudent for me to pass as much as possible unnoticed, I entered the town of Cordova, equipped myself as you see, and then proceeded on my journey, living occasionally at convents, and on the beneficence of the hospitable people of the country.

"My way was long, and, as I walked slowly, and was obliged to rest frequently, it was a considerable time before I got to the banks of the Ebro.

"The night before I reached them, I was visited by a dream nearly resembling that which I had in the prison of Liguena.

"Gonzalvo came in as before, and repeated the words: 'Sire, seek my lost child.'

"As before, I strove to embrace him, when, methought, he turned from me, uttering a sigh that seemed to shake his frame to pieces.

"We can no more,' he said, and walked away from me, when, methought, a ghastly wound on his head yawned and discovered his brains, and the blood ran in a torrent down his back.

"My soul, which till that minute was a stranger to the impression of fear, shrank with horror at the sight.

"I trembled, gave a loud and hollow groan, and awoke in an agony.

"I ardently longed for the return of day.

"It came, and brought no consolation.

"My dream had banished every gleam of comfort from my soul, and left nothing there but gloom, horror, and darkness. Yet shall I own to you that at intervals the pride of the warrior broke in upon my reveries, and painted to me imaginary prospects of revenge.

"I traversed the banks of the Ebro for many leagues, inquiring in vain for the Marquess of Punalada, till I came near that part which once owned me for its lord—a place I should above all others have avoided were it not for the hopes of seeing my grandchild, or, at least, hearing of him—an indulgence which I deferred only for the purpose of being first satisfied about his father and mother.

"As I approached, therefore, I felt all the torments of suspense and apprehension.

"At length, however, I arrived within a short distance of the castle.

"It was evening when I knocked at the door of the first peasant's cottage within the boundaries of the lordship of Montalto.

"A stranger appeared, who rudely demanded my business.

"I told him I desired to see Juan, the man of the house.

"If you mean Juan Navarre,' returned he, 'you must look for him somewhere else!'

"What, my friend,' said I, 'is not this his cottage?'

"No,' returned the clown; 'it was once his, but, thank God and my master, it is mine now.'

"And pray who is your master?'

"The Marquess de Punalada.'

"The Marquess de Punalada?'

"Yes, the Marquess de Punalada. The Baron de Rayo, its former owner, has been put to death for high treason, and the King gave that castle yonder, and this estate, to my master. It is not above three days since he left it, and went to his other estate in Andalusia.'

"Oh, heavens! what were my feelings! How I supported them I know not!

"The circumstance that Punalada, the specious friend of Gonzalvo, rather than any other person, should have got possession of our confiscated property, struck, like lightning, a thought across my mind—a suspicion of an act too full of horror, guilt, and wickedness, for man to perpetrate; and, in the fulness of my heart, I exclaimed:

"Oh, cursed villain!'

"The fellow, full of resentment at my abuse (as I suppose he thought, of himself), lifted his arm to strike me. I smote him to the ground, and retired.

"Proceeding hastily to the next cottage, which was that in which my grandson was nursed, I received an answer there to nearly the same effect.

"Apprehending that the peasant, recovering, might collect a number of his lord's vassals to assist him and fall upon me, in which case resistance or expostulation would be equally vain, I turned into a wood, and by a well-known path arrived at a village out of the power of the lord of the castle of Montalto, and calling at a cottage, took up my lodging for the night.

"Determined upon getting the best information I could, and above all to find out where my grandson was lodged, I prevailed upon the son of my host to go to the castle and the contiguous village and make the necessary inquiries.

"He returned soon, and brought me an account that there was not one of the former inhabitants living on the lordship; that all were put out and replaced by strangers, nor could it be found where any of them went.

"You will allow that nothing could now be added to the measure of my afflictions—it was already running over.

"Lost, then,' I exclaimed—'lost indeed, my Gonzalvo! My Maria, lost is thy child! I fear yourselves too! Where, oh where, blessed Father, shall my sorrows end? Whither shall I go? Where turn me to find my children, if yet they live? Alas, I know not! Here, then, lay thee down, wretched old man, and patiently await the hand of death which soon shall visit thee and heal thy woes; or go to the castle, assert thy right against the base vassals that possess it; slay all who oppose thee, till, thyself slain, thou shalt pull down a number to the grave with thee, and fall gloriously amidst the ruins of thy enemies!'

"Here, stifled with rage, I fell on the floor in a state of insensibility, to which a languor succeeded that in all probability tended to save me from the more acute effects of my passion.

"The good people of the cottage, much affected with my emotions, used every little art to console me, exhorting the wretches who could aim a blow at a head so white as mine.

"Urged by their repeated solicitations, I at length took some food and went to bed. Here sleep, which usually flies from the couch of the unhappy, led on by fatigue, visited me.

"Still, I was haunted with the former dream with little variation, and determined to pursue as far as I could the admonition.

"I therefore first repaired to Toledo to inquire of the chief officers of Henry Transtamare's army whether Gonzalvo had ever gone over; and, after a most minute investigation, found that no such event had ever taken place.

"I thereupon resolved to commit myself to the direction of Providence, and search for my children either till I found them or lost my life.

"Under this determination, I first visited the Court of Navarre, then that of Portugal; thence crossed Spain again over to the kingdom of Arragon.

"Finding no trace anywhere of the objects of my pursuit, I formed the desperate resolution of going to the Moorish territory of Grenada, on the bare possibility of Gonzalvo's having been by some unlucky means enslaved by the infidels.

"Two years' weary travelling, supported by the alms of the charitable, could not deter me from my purpose. I

therefore turned my face that way, and proceeded, supported by the hope which the frequent visitation of my dream inspired me with.

"The second night I took up my lodging among the charitable fathers of a Franciscan monastery.

"I informed them of my intention, giving them at the same time my reasons for it, and disclosing to them the whole of my misfortunes.

"One of them—a grave, wise, and learned man—undertook to dissuade me from it.

"He remarked that the disappearance of my son and daughter happened in a place and at a time that the Moors could not by any possibility have been instrumental to it. He said that he thought the much greater probability was that they had been, for some hidden purpose, cut off by the cruel hand of Peter, and that by going to Grenada I should only bring down additional misery on myself, and lose the small probability there was of recovering or finding out my grandchild, and he finally advised (in which all agreed with him) that I should rather go to Toledo, apply to the Archbishop, and through him get an order of Government to search for them.

"I perceived that, in the eagerness of my desires, I had confounded my judgment, and that I had, in the flame of pursuit, overlooked several material objections to my plan.

"That night I went to bed undecided in my intentions; still I was visited with the dream.

"Gonzalvo again showed his cloven skull, and again urged my departure in search of his child.

"Alas, my child!" said I, "whither shall I go?"

"Go!" said he. "Fate will instruct thee, and guide thy steps!"

"Methought I immediately went forth on the desired search. I walked with difficulty up a steep hill.

"At length I thought I reached a field, where two armies were drawn out in preparation for engagement. The trumpets sounded a charge. The martial clamour filled my soul with a transport not to be described. I wielded my lance, and was hesitating into which side of the scales I should throw my weight, when methought you, Sir Isidore, stepped forward, cased in full armour.

"You came down to me, and said:

"Noble Rayo, Isidore de Haro will give your children to your arms, or perish in the attempt!"

"With that, I thought you vanished, but soon returned; and, advancing towards me smiling, presented me a golden helmet, in which was laid my child—my Alphonso.

"I suddenly grasped the helmet, and snatched the child to my bosom, when, looking down, I perceived that the helmet, falling, had killed his father, who lay bleeding in agony on the ground.

"My woe and horror were unutterable.

"I turned the point of my javelin towards my breast, determined to rush upon it, when methought you held me, and, struggling with me, snatched the fatal weapon from my hand, and said:

"Grieve not! Be patient! All shall yet be well. I will be myself a father to Alphonso."

"In endeavouring to throw my arms about you, I awoke.

"This new dream furnished my heated imagination with new materials to work upon—a train of new ideas took place, and a new plan arose from them.

"Perhaps," thought I, "Isidore may yet live—perhaps uncorrupted, too. I will seek him out," thought I, "and leave the rest to the great disposer of events."

"I arose early next morning, and set forward on my way to the Court of Henry, with an intention to ascertain the fact whether you were dead or not; and, I confess, I was startled at the apparent past derangement of my mind, which could so long have dwelt upon my misery without thinking of so obvious a remedy as this probably offered.

"I travelled some days, when, accidentally passing through your village, I chanced to hear your name mentioned in such terms as convinced me that I was near the habitation of a friend. And now I am here, I must confess that I find myself, I know not why, in a state of more internal composure than I have for years been accustomed to; and weak though it may appear to you, the frequent visitations of Gonzalvo, and his injunctions in the dream, and the subsequent one in which you appeared, coupled with the circumstance of meeting you, the name and per-

sonal appearance of this lovely youth, together with a confused crowd of other ideas, rush on my mind with a force which reason cannot resist.

"Here he paused, and fixing his eyes on Don Isidore, as if to catch every passage of his mind through his eyes, he continued:

"Tell me, Isidore, in pity to a father's feelings, tell me: Knowest thou, or hast thou heard aught of Gonzalvo, or of my daughter? And, oh, do not delay to solve the torturing doubts of my wretched, careworn heart. Say, who is this youth—this Alphonso? Oh, say! for much my mind misgives me; and sure, if I be mistaken, the strong resemblance warrants me—in him Gonzalvo all appears in renovated youth, moves in every step, and speaks in every sentence that he utters!"

"Don Isidore, struck with astonishment at the conclusion of this story, stared for some time at the baron in transfixed silence.

"If the misfortunes of a family he so entirely loved affected him with sorrow, the whimsical transition from it to his son smote him to the soul.

"He loved the baron with more than filial tenderness, and as he always admired him for his extraordinary valour, so he revered him for his superior wisdom; but to see his soul so shaken and his understanding so enfeebled as to yield up his reason to the mere illusion of fancy, and to suffer his judgment to be so tainted by the false colourings of a dream as to call in question his property in his own child, shocked him beyond measure.

"The resemblance his son bore to Gonzalvo he had himself noticed, and with pleasure noticed, as it served to keep up the remembrance of a much-loved, long-lost friend and relation. But the baron's straining the resemblance to a conclusion so wild and extravagant was a falling-off too lamentable not to overwhelm him with grief and astonishment.

"Unable, from those impressions on his feelings, to speak, he, for some moments, continued silent, his face imprinted with the strongest marks of concern, while the baron's hope gaining new strength from the pause, cast a visible gleam of satisfaction over his countenance.

"My dear lord and most valued friend," said he, after some hesitation, "to say that your misfortunes affect me as though they were my own, and that there is nothing within the compass of my power which I would not do to redress or relieve you from them, is to speak far short of my feelings and inclinations, and is no more than I trust you will readily believe. Would to Heaven that the remedy were immediately to follow the effort, and sleep should not seal my eyelids ere you found it! In the disappearance of Gonzalvo my loss is not less, nor did my grief fall short of yours, but with the extinction of hope my grief has abated; I have long ceased to think that he lives; some account of him, else, must surely long since have reached his friends, but as to the mode or cause of his disappearance I find myself as unable to form even a vague conjecture as you can be. As to the rest, hear my story and be satisfied.

CHAPTER DLXXXIV.

EDGORTH BESS FINDS THE OLD STORY INCREASE IN POWER AND INTEREST.

"You may remember that previous to our going against Algeiras we were entertained at the Court of Alphonso, then at Burgos, and treated with uncommon marks of distinction. There was a vast concourse of nobility there, as well those who were going to the war as their friends and relations, who came to spend as much time as possible with them before their departure, and bided them a final adieu.

"Don Alvarez de Guzman was at that time the King's chief favourite, and of course the most considerable person present.

"The pomp and dignity of this great man's family contributed to the splendour of the Court, but no part of it so much as his fair niece, Donna Isabella de Guzman, who seemed to engross the eyes and admiration of the Court, and to eclipse all the young ladies then present, though there were many of the first in estimation, both for birth and beauty, in the train of the Queen Maria.

"As Gonzalvo and I stood in a familiar degree of intimacy with Don Alvarez, I had frequent opportunities

of conversing with Donna Isabella. I found that her mind was as highly gifted with wit and enriched with knowledge as her person was with beauty.

"Not to trouble you with a detail of minute circumstances, interesting only to the parties concerned, we conceived a reciprocal tenderness for each other, and I obtained her consent to demand her in marriage from her father, and to that end to ask the assistance of Don Alvarez; but as her father was of a very high rank and proud position, and I at the time but a soldier of fortune, it was determined that I should wait till my services entitled me to rank, which, in the scene to which we were then going, was likely soon to happen.

"We privately plighted our faith to each other, and parted with mutual assurances of eternal and inviolable fidelity.

"Soon after we took the field.

"What happened then and afterwards at Gibraltar up to the time of your departure I need not mention. The King, you know, honoured me with knighthood, and on your returning home I resolved to remain with the army returning to Castile, actuated perhaps by a thirst for glory, but certainly by my passion for the fair Isabella too.

"And here, my lord, it may be proper to make an excuse to you for a concealment that favours too strongly of insincerity.

"My duty to you, who were more than a father to me, and the confidence which your friendship entitled you to demand a communication of so very important an affair; but the truth is, I was doubtful of success, and too proud to circulate the shame (as I then thought it) of a disappointment if I should fail. Let it satisfy you that I did not communicate it even to Gonzalvo.

"But to return whence I have digressed.

"I thought my newly-acquired honours gave me more reasonable pretensions, and made this a fit season to introduce the subject of my passion to Alvarez, not doubting, from the strong friendship he expressed for me, and which I thought was sincere, that he would willingly render me all the service he could on the occasion.

"Whatever his private feelings, on my opening the business to him, might have been, he affected to take my proposal in good part, but told me that to the King and Queen Dowager Maria I must make my suit, as they had honoured the young lady with their patronage, and had taken to themselves the task of providing for her a suitable alliance.

"The duplicity of Alvarez must have been obvious to anyone who was not blinded by excess of passion on one hand, and the security of sincere friendship on the other.

"I thought he was sincere; whereas, if I had only taken the pains to reflect, I might have seen that he should have taken the office of opening the matter to the King upon himself.

"However, as I stood tolerably well with Peter, I felt little repugnance to disclose my inclinations to him, which I did on the succeeding day, in the most modest way I could, concluding with an account of our reciprocal attachment, and of our engagement to each other which we had entered into previous to my taking the field.

"I was much surprised to see the King knit his brows, and discover manifest marks of displeasure, during the latter part of my speech.

"When I had done:

"Don Isidore de Haro," said he, "we have been pleased with thy services to our royal father, and have given thee proofs of our approbation. But think no more of this lady, as you value our favour. We have already provided her with a suitable match—our royal word is pledged, and cannot be departed from."

"I ventured to remonstrate, but he was inflexible, and I left his presence in a state compared with which the ordinary miseries of life were comfort.

"I sought Alvarez, and he told me that he was from the beginning apprehensive that I should not succeed, for that he had reason to believe the King purposed marrying her with the noble family of Garcias.

"With all the dissimulation of a true courtier, Don Alvarez affected to console with me on my misfortune, and left him nothing relieved by his discourse, though full of gratitude for his friendly sympathy.

"The agitation into which I was thrown by this mortifying refusal affected me so violently that I was taken

extremely ill of a fever, the cause of which my pride urged me to keep concealed.

"In this extremity, I had nothing to support or relieve me but my dependence on the fidelity of my Isabella, whose soul was far above falsehood or caprice, and the indefatigable attentions of my faithful servant, Pierot, who, in his grief and care for me, brought himself into a state of health little better than my own.

"Thus was I nearly reduced to all the horrors of sickness, solitude, and disappointed passion.

"What," thought I, "avail my newly-acquired titles? I am a step of honour higher, it is true, but all my hopes of happiness are perhaps for ever blasted. Titles, rank, and all the pride of man! what are you but deceit? You mock misery, point the sting of adversity, and hold out the horrors of ruin to our view in tenfold amplification!

"In short, I not only forgot my honours, but myself also, and lived for some time almost unconscious of existence.

"I was roused from this state of torpid despair by an account that Peter was preparing to arm against our present King, then Count Transtamare.

"The news struck a gleam of light across my mind. Love suggested hope, and pride whispered revenge.

"I had known Henry during the life of Alphonso; we had often conversed and hunted together, and he professed a strong friendship for me as well as for Gonzalvo.

"You will not wonder, then, that the character of Peter, the insult he had already offered, and those which it was probable I might yet receive at his hands, joined to my respect and love for Henry, should of themselves even, exclusive of my passion for the fair Isabella, suggest to me the idea of deserting the service of the tyrant and flying to that of his adversary.

"The thought no sooner occurred than my resolution was taken, and I only waited for an opportunity of once more seeing my Isabella to carry it into execution.

"This opportunity soon offered.

"I informed her of the King's resolution, of my determination to retire, and wait for a more favourable time to complete our wishes. I conjured her to be firm in rejecting any proposals of marriage from another quarter, and assured her that it was my determination to take her from under the tyrant's power, or perish in the attempt!

"She answered that it was probable that would be effected without my interference, as the Queen-mother, Maria, in whose suite she was at the head of the confederacy formed against Peter, and in league with Count Transtamare. And finally, she assured me that nothing but death or my own inclination should keep us from uniting our fates together.

"We knelt down together, and with the holy rosary and crucifix clasped in our hands, swore to each other mutual fidelity.

"That very evening I departed, attended by my faithful Pierot, whose joy at getting fairly out of Peter's reach, which happened about sunrise the ensuing morning, burst forth in a strain of songs, jests, and observations, so simple, so pleasant, and so natural, that my gloomy reflections were insensibly banished from my heart, and I felt a transport the more exquisite as it was so long a stranger to me.

"When I reached Toro, where Henry was assembling his forces, he received me with open arms, expressed an earnest wish that Barons Rayo and Gonzalvo would shake off their attachment to the tyrant, and join him, but assured me that he well knew the refined principle upon which the baron adhered to the reigning monarch, and that rigid honour and integrity which governed his actions—but the event of this contest, be what it would, he and his family should be protected.

"Not to detain you with a recital of events which you know as well as me, the fall of Toledo was the fate of our cause. I escaped out of it by a miracle, and, still attended by my faithful Pierot, bent my course towards Portugal.

"The extreme fatigue of my body, joined to the anxiety of my mind, brought me again so low that I was obliged to take up my lodgings at a peasant's cottage on the banks of the river Guadiana.

"Here the genial temperature of the air, the wholesome, simple diet, the uninterrupted repose of the cottage and its inhabitants, whose cheerfulness insensibly found

its way to my heart, and, above all, the exertions of my faithful Pierot to entertain and serve me, facilitated my recovery and made a considerable alteration in my spirits.

"I soon had strength to bathe and to hunt in the woods; and, pleased with the daily increase of my health and strength, remained there till I was perfectly recovered.

"It was not without great regret that I quitted this sweet, humble abode of innocence, hospitality and pleasure.

"After making the cottagers the best return I could for their hospitality, we separated, not without emotions of sorrow on all sides.

"I thought that Pierot would have broken his heart, and nothing less than his attachment to me could have torn him from them.

"Ah, your honour," said he, as we were travelling along, "that is what may be called living—that is a life after God's own heart! There we were neither afraid of crafty, undermining rivals, false friends, or cunning courtiers—there we had neither envy, jealousy, fraud, nor dissimulation—there we could lie down in our beds without any apprehension of death, but such as the Almighty might be pleased to visit us—without any fear of being one day pushed into the field of battle, and next day upon the scaffold—there were no tyrants to cut us off—no Peter to rob us of our sweethearts."

"This last word roused me from a state of repose in which the unusual calmness of our life at the cottage and the exhilarating influence of returning vigour had laid me.

"I relapsed into reflection.

"I began again to feel all the misery of being thus tyrannically cut off from everything that could render life supportable to me. I was stung to the quick at the thoughts of Isabella's being put into the hands of a rival; and as strength increased, the vigour of my mind increasing also, I began to examine the grounds of my despondence, and found that much of it was owing to a momentary awe impressed upon me by the furious and known relentless nature of the tyrant Peter, and the consequent depression of my spirits.

"I began to censure my too easy acquiescence, blushed for the meanness of my conduct, and heartily scorned myself for the abject dereliction of the duty I owed to my own happiness, and to the faith I plighted to Isabella.

"All allegiance to Peter was cast off; my fortunes were inseparably connected with those of Transtamare, which, though at present clouded, were far from extinguished, the wickedness of Peter himself being a more powerful engine in his favour than all the hosts of France.

"With this prospect, such as it was, I thought I could be content, could I only get possession of my Isabella.

"I should have told you that on the rupture between the queen-mother and Peter, she retired to her father's house.

"One difficulty only, therefore, lay in my way; but that was, to all appearance, an almost insuperable one, the probability being that, as Peter had crushed the confederacy, her father would not merely refuse his consent, but use every stratagem to deliver me up to the tyrant.

"I determined, however, to leave no means un essayed on my part, and to trust the rest to the affection of my Isabella, and the direction of Providence.

"Having thus adjusted the matter in my mind, I recrossed the Guadiana, and, disguised in the dress of a common Pisano, turned by the most unfrequented ways back through Spain towards Talavera, at a small distance from which—but where, particularly, I did not know—her father had his abode.

"After some days' weary travelling, I found myself near Talavera, and, in order to get proper information, determined to stop at the first cottage I came to.

"It was not long till one offered, of a most inviting appearance. With the cheerful consent of the people, I dismounted from my horse and entered, and found it within clean and well accommodated, beyond anything I could have hoped for, or had ever seen with peasants.

"After eating a hearty dinner, I retired to a small room to repose me after the fatigues of the journey, and soon fell into a profound sleep.

"I had not enjoyed it long, when I was awakened by a hand shaking me by the shoulder rather roughly.

"Surprise! I looked up, and saw Pierot hanging over me, with a face in which the most whimsical mixture of various expressions was portrayed.

"Joy, however, was the predominant trait, and I was pleased before I had reason to think I had cause to be so.

"Lor, your honour," said he, "I hope you will pardon my waking you, but I could not, for the life of me, refrain. Oh, blessed Virgin! can you think it—the strangest, luckiest, oddest affair!"

"What!" exclaimed I. "Prithce say what it is?"

"Oh, your honour, I am half dead with joy, for to be sure nobody could have expected it! Did not I tell your honour how I dreamed last night that the horse you rode was all on fire under you, and yet never consumed or burned? and did I not tell you that it was a blessed dream, and that luck would come of it? and did not I tell you—"

"What, indefatigable babbler—what is it you would tell me?"

"Well—well, say what you will, dreams come out as true as the gospel of St. John of God."

"For Heaven's sake, Pierot, have you a mind to rack my brain to pieces with suspense, and make it as wild as your own? Tell me quickly what you mean, or, by Heaven—"

"Well, to be sure! If I thought your worship would be angry, my throat should have burst with the story ere I would have disturbed you! God knows, I thought that you would have flown through the roof of the house like a spark of fire up the chimney at the very mention of it."

"Hear me, Pierot," said I, hastily. "If you have aught that concerns my peace, which by the wildness of your looks and the incoherence of your words I am inclined to believe, let me have it in three words, or here I abjure you!"

"Three words, indeed—three words!" rejoined Pierot. "Lord of Heaven help you—it is worth three thousand words! But what are words? Three thousand pieces of gold—three thousand rubies and emeralds would be too cheap a purchase for such good—such delight—ful—"

"Begone!" said I, in a rage. "Fly before I am tempted to commit some rash action, and annihilate you on the spot—brute—ass—barbarian!"

"Here I rose up in the bed, and lifting up a chair, was going to let it fly at him, when he walked away, muttering to himself, and getting outside the door, and half thrusting in his head, with a look of reproach, he said:

"You are too angry, then, to hear news of my Lady Isabella?"

"Gracious God!" exclaimed I, leaping from my bed—"Lady Isabella! Say again! Where? How? In what way? Tell me—tell me all!"

"Aha!" said he, triumphantly. "I thought your honour was not quite awake at first, or you would not have made such a difficulty of hearing my story! You must know, then, that in this very house, this that we now are in, and in that very bed in which you just now lay, and by that clean, orderly, neat, good-looking old body of a woman that you saw sitting in the wicker chair (well happy was her lot, and she says so herself)!"

"Sdeath! What of her?"

"There now, again; you cannot have patience, and I telling you in as few words as possible. By her, then, was your noble, dear, charming Lady Isabella nursed."

"Mother of mercy, is it possible?"

"Possible. Is my name Pierot? As sure, then, as it is my name, so true is what I say. Nay, this very morning did she bless this cottage with her presence, and to-morrow will come again; nay, if good luck befall, she may be here perhaps this evening, for it is yet far from night, and she sometimes comes after dinner."

"In a fit of rapture I threw my arms round my faithful Pierot, whose joy was nearly as great as my own, and who, while I was dressing, told me, in his disjointed, consequential manner, at which I should on another occasion have laughed, that the nurse, mentioning her young lady's name, and he, asking her if she ever heard of mine, declared that I had been almost the only subject of conversation between them for some time, and that she spoke of me as of a person already her husband.

"This account made me think that I should run no hazard in informing the old woman who I was.



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES SEARCHING FOR THEIR HORSES IN THE GARDEN OF THE HOUSE TO LET.]

"I called her, therefore, into the room, and told her. She wept for joy, and declared it was the happiest event she had for a long time known, as she was sure it would render her child (so she called my Isabella) completely blest.

"She had not long retired, when we heard the outer door open and a person enter. A confused, indistinct buzzing of female voices succeeded, and continued for some minutes. At length I heard a well-known voice—a voice more ravishing to my ears than seraphs' songs!

"Is it possible? Gracious Heaven! is it possible? Is my Isidore in this house?"

"Unable to contain myself, I burst from the room and caught her in my arms.

"Yes, my love—my faithful, my adored Isabella—your Isidore is here; and this blessed, joyful interview has more than recompensed for ages of affliction! Oh, my Isabella, didst thou but know what pangs—what sufferings mine have been!"

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"Here I was interrupted by the old woman with:

"I do not know, young senor, what your sufferings may have been, but many and many a tear has my young lady here in this very spot shed over your name; and even I, who did not know you, was fain to keep her company, she did so take on. But Lord, sir! I hope you will go fighting no more—fighting is a woundy, mischievous, unchristianlike thing, and no luck can come of it; and then my lady trembles so at the very thoughts of it that I wonder how you could have the heart to set about it."

"The old woman's gabble was a very seasonable relief to Isabella, who had sunk into my arms in a soft, speechless delirium of joy and surprise.

"As soon as cool reflection resumed its seat, I told her everything that occurred as I have already told it to you, and desired her advice upon the steps necessary to be taken to ensure our happiness.

"The division between Queen Maria and her son Peter, she said, had not altered the intention of the

latter; and she candidly confessed that she had received her father's positive commands to entertain Garcias as her husband—that she was convinced all attempts to alter his resolution would be vain, and that my discovering myself would certainly be attended with utter ruin.

"Under those circumstances, she said, she was at a loss what to advise; but knowing my honour, and convinced of my sincerity and affection, was willing to adopt any means that I should prescribe to her.

"We now called the old nurse into consultation, and after some deliberation, it was agreed that we should be married the next morning at the cottage, and that the ensuing night she should leave her father's abode unobserved, and join me at the cottage, whence we should immediately depart and take shelter in Arragon till I could get intelligence where Count Transtamare had disposed of himself.

"Early next morning the old woman despatched her husband to a neighbouring village for a priest who lived there, to prevail on him to come to the cottage and perform the ceremony; and in the meantime, sent away a young lad, her son, to the town of Talavera, under pretence of getting medicines for her guest, who feigned sickness for the purpose, in order that he should be no interruption, nor suspect what was going forward.

"The old man being properly qualified to apply to the feelings of the priest—that is to say, having a purse well stocked with money—readily obtained his consent, and they both were betimes in the cottage to breakfast.

"Nothing was wanting now but the bride. With eager eyes I traced the path she was to come. I grew uneasy, then impatient. At last my heart sank into despair.

"At length she appeared.

"Oh, my Isabella!" said I, in a tone of tender reproach; "my heart was dying within me. The day was so far advanced, I began to fear you were detained!"

"Thou darest impatient!" said she; "dost thou not know that it is not yet eight o'clock?"

"Such are the thorny feelings, such the hopes and fears of true love."

"But why do I trouble you with a foolish detail of useless, uninteresting trifles?"

"Oh, proceed with it," said the baron. "Be minute—be particular; the most refined, intellectual sensation, the most exquisite delight, is that which arises from a nice investigation of the virtuous passions. Always an admirer of beauty—always the friend of love—age has not diminished my admiration of the one, nor my esteem for the other; and I declare that no part of your story has afforded me so much pleasure as the description of your passion and fondness for your amiable Isabella!"

"Ah, baron," returned Don Isidore, "amiable indeed! Had you known her—had that bliss but been reserved for me to see you clasp her in your fond, parental arms and bestow your blessing—"

"Hold, Isidore!" interrupted the baron. "Have I not griefs enough already? Wouldst thou that this, too, was added to the load? Alas! I fear—nay, I feel that I shall but too much deplore her loss upon the strength of thy description—to lose her when known might have been too much. But go on, my child—I interrupt you."

"To proceed; we were married in presence of the old couple, their daughter, who attended my Isabella, and my honest Pierot, who, perhaps, in excess of joy, fell not short of ourselves. He mused, he capered, he cried, and laughed alternately; and when the knot was tied, his reason overcome by the overflowing of his heart, he dropped on his knees at Isabella's feet, and, snatching up her hand, kissed it as if he would devour it, wept till he wetted it, and called her his master's saviour!"

"The priest gave me a proper certificate of our marriage, and departed, after having given the most solemn assurances of secrecy.

"Isabella returned to her father's house, and I retired to my room in a state of delicious transport that I was before a stranger to.

"I spent the rest of the day in framing plans of future happiness for myself and my Isabella.

"Impatiently did I wish for night. It at length came, and in due time brought my treasure to my arms.

"We set out without loss of time—Isabella mounted on my horse, while I rode on that of Pierot, and he and

Inez, my wife's attendant, on a mule purchased of the old man for the purpose.

"I thought it most advisable to take the shortest road possible out of Peter's dominions, and therefore struck into one that led to the kingdom of Arragon.

"We arrived without any material accident at the city of Saragossa, where a rumour was in circulation that there was immediately expected a rupture between the kingdoms of Castile and Arragon.

"I directly despatched an account of this to the Count Transtamare, then taking refuge at the Court of France, in order that he might turn the rupture to the most advantageous account his policy might suggest to him.

"It was not long after that Henry himself appeared at Saragossa, entered into a league with the King of Arragon, and took the field once more against Peter.

"The prudence and valour of Henry gave victory to the Arragonian troops wherever he led them.

"I was seldom from his side, and can say that no man ever deserved good Fortune better, for as none showed greater power in winning her over, so none ever made a better use of her when won.

"The war was very successful.

"However, the King of Arragon thought proper to patch up a peace with Peter. Henry conceiving it prudent not to confide too far in him, returned again to Paris, attended by his wife Joanna—who had been rescued from the tyrant's hands—and by me and my Isabella.

"While we were in Arragon, my wife was delivered of a son—that same boy whom you honour with your regard. Henry was his godfather, and, with my consent, named him Alphonso, in honour of the King his father's memory.

"His mother, being extremely ill and weak after his birth, it was thought expedient to put the child out to nurse; and as we were to go into France, and it was necessary to leave the child behind, we despatched Pierot to Isabella's old nurse, at Talavera, to procure one she could depend on there, in order to be under her eye.

"The child accordingly was given to the woman sent by her with Pierot, and who went back attended again by him, furnished with a sufficient sum for three years' expenses, to be delivered to the old woman for disbursement.

"The anguish at parting with this dear, first pledge of our loves was unutterable; my wife's particularly was so extreme that she could scarcely support it; and she proceeded to Paris with a heart foreboding an eternal separation from her child.

"Of the various fortunes of Count Transtamare in his struggling for the throne with Peter, as you must already know them, I need not inform you more particularly, as it would break in upon the thread of my story. Suffice it to say I was with him in all; and even when domestic sorrow made me unfit for the world, I attended him.

"The sun of my bridal rose with brightness—but was, alas! eclipsed in its meridian!

"My wife had two children in the three years following the birth of Alphonso, who both died infants.

"In the fifth year she again proved pregnant—fatally pregnant. In due time she had a daughter, who closed the scene for me. Nine days after its birth I lost my comfort, my peace, my all in Isabella. She died, and left me the most miserable of all created beings.

"Yes, yes!—all joy vanished with my Isabella!"

"Here Don Isidore stopped, hastily arose from his seat, and retired.

"The good old baron, who saw and participated in his affliction, patiently sat, with brimful eyes, in expectation of his return.

"At length Don Isidore came back—took his seat—gave the baron a squeeze by the hand, with a look soliciting pity—and endeavoured to proceed.

"The baron purposely interrupted him.

"Did you hear nothing of your wife's father all this time, and did Don Alvarez take no steps to mediate between you and his brother?"

"I should have told you, in its proper place, that my wife opened to me the whole artifice and duplicity of Alvarez. It was at his instigation that the King resolved to marry her to Garcias, and she incurred his resentment by her resistance. When Isabella was brought to bed of her first child, I wrote to her father to inform him of the event, beseeching his blessing for his daughter and her

child. He sent me a reply, gross and rude to the last degree, disclaiming all connection with his daughter, and threatening me with the utmost vengeance of the King.

"I despised the threat as much as I contemned the man, and contented myself with having done my duty to him.

"Meantime, I failed not in my inquiries about you and Gonzalvo, the recollection of whom constantly overcast even my happiest moments, as the frequent passing clouds preparatory to a storm darkened the fair face of day.

"From the strange variety of contradictory accounts I received of you both, I had nothing left to conclude but that you had both fallen victims to the rage or jealousy of the tyrant; and I never could get rid of a goading reflection that by possibility I might by my desertion have excited the monster's jealousy and contributed to your ruin.

"As I had proved myself the zealous adherent and faithful servant of Henry, so he proved the most noble and generous of masters to me.

"When, by killing the tyrant, he got possession of the throne, one of his first acts was to bestow this estate upon me.

"He solicited me earnestly to remain about his person; but on declaring to him the state of my mind, and that nothing but the duty I felt to attend him in his dangers could have so long kept me from my so-much-desired retirement, he gave up the point, and honoured me by saying:

"How few, Don Isidore, are found, like you, ready to share in a monarch's dangers, and unwilling to participate of the splendours of his Court! Go, then. You know my power—be not distrustful of my inclination. Your services exceed the one, but not the other. Tax both to the utmost, and you shall not be disappointed. One promise only I exact from you, namely—that I see you once a year at least."

"He has ever since continued to load me with favours, and designs to provide amply for his son—for so he calls Alphonso.

"I was performing my promise of an annual visit when you first arrived here, and I still find him the same gracious and beneficent prince.

"One of his chief favourites is married to an aunt of my wife—the sister of her father. She affects friendship, but I can see that he and she abhor me, as they conceive a star between them and the inheritance of Don Pedro Guzman father-in-law's estate. But it is no matter. I know the King, and have no other feeling for them and their hatred than contempt.

"Since I came here, my chief prop has been my son Alphonso. His instruction has engrossed my whole care, my daughter being with the Marchioness del Oro, in Lisbon, who insisted upon taking her to herself.

"I must confess that the growing perfections of my son, every day disclosing some new beauty, beguile me of a portion of my sorrows.

"The clouds of misery that so entirely obscured my happiness begin to disperse, and the presence and conversation of you, my dear, revered patron and father (seizing the baron by the hand), will help to clear the whole hemisphere before me, and give the setting of my life that brightness which your counsel and protection afforded to its rising.

"One thing now on the expressions which have fallen from you about my son.

"When I consider the strong resemblance he bears to Gonzalvo—which I have often with pleasure noted, and which, considering their close consanguinity, is not so surprising, coupled with the circumstance of his bearing the name of Alphonso, which you say was that of Gonzalvo's son—I cannot so much wonder at your emotions.

"Nevertheless, one thing has struck me with astonishment,—that a soul so vigorous as yours—a mind fraught with all knowledge, and endued with so much wisdom—could yield to the suggestions of a dream—a creature of fancy—a mere being of the imagination. To act by the monitions of such illusive shadows is to act against reason and against nature."

"Nature, my dear Isidore," returned the baron, "cannot give us a reason for all things, as most sceptics expect it should. That phenomenon, the marking of the fetus by external objects, and even by the workings of the imagination, is as much beyond the reach of human rea-

son as the monitions of a dream or the appearance of departed spirits. The difference is, that the experience of almost all is in favour of the one—that of few in favour of the other. If, then, we be so ignorant of things immediately subject to our senses, what must we be in those of the soul abstracted from them?"

"Don Isidore shook his head, but said nothing.

"Dinner was served in. The happy Alphonso could hardly eat with the delight the baron's company afforded him; such charms have cheerful, accommodating old age for the tender heart of youth.

"It was that day determined that Don Isidore should proceed to Court to get the attainer taken off the baron, and that till that was effected he should remain undisturbed.

CHAPTER DLXXXV.

IN WHICH THE STORY OF OLD TIMES IS CONTINUED.

"WHEN Alphonso withdrew, after dinner, he was accosted by Pierot with:

"Don Alphonso (accompanied by a significant wink, and beck of his hand, as who should say, 'Follow me'), I have something to communicate to you."

"Alphonso followed.

"Pierot led him through the yard, then, looking about to see if the place was sufficiently secure from observation, he led him into the garden; thence, again, with the same precaution, into the vineyard, and thence into the field of exercise; then leading him into the very middle, as remote as possible from any place of concealment where listeners might stand, lest possibly some person might be there to hear what he was about to say.

"Taking Alphonso by a button, and staring full in his face with a look of infinite sagacity and importance, he said, in a whispering voice:

"Don Alphonso, do you know this old harper in the great hall?"

"How should I know, Pierot?" said Alphonso.

"Does my master, Don Isidore, know him?"

"Alphonso, unwilling to break the secrecy imposed upon him by his father, yet averse to telling a direct falsehood, replied:

"How should my father know him, since he has not seen him many hours?"

"I tell you what it is, master— But, to be sure, it may be a silly thing I am going to say!"

"No matter," returned the youth; "say it, whatever it may be."

"Well, then— To be sure, I may be wrong, but my mind misgives me strangely!"

"What would you say? Don't fear! I shall never mention it! Speak out!"

"As I hope for mercy, the sight of the old harper made my hair stand on end; nay, the thought of him now makes my blood run in my body, and I wish he was well away from the house!"

"Why, what dost thou mean?" said Alphonso.

"I mean that—but— Well, I don't know how to say it!"

"Say it, be it what it may!" returned Alphonso.

"Well, your honour has often heard Don Isidore talk of the Baron de Rayo. He was a good man, to be sure; but that is no matter. I don't like to have anything to do with the dead! Well, you must know that this baron, within—I mean he that's like him—he, I say, was in the Tower of Liguenea for high treason, put there by that villain, Peter; and there he died, or, as some say, was put to death, by the orders of that devil incarnate, whom Christ pardon! Don Isidore took on so about him, and used to sigh and groan for him; and no wonder, for he was a father to him. Well, what do you think? But—but—I know you will laugh at me!"

"Indeed, Pierot, I will not! Let it be what it will, I shall not laugh at you!"

"Look you, Don Alphonso!" said he, clapping one hand on the top of his head and the other under his chin, "is this head I hold in my hands mine, or not?"

"Certainly it is, Pierot."

"Then, as sure as it is, the old harper in the hall is the ghost of the Baron de Rayo, who died in the Tower of Liguenea! It is, at least, his fetch! I knew him all the time he was at dinner, in spite of all his care to hide himself; and I trembled and shook like an aspen leaf, for

he spoke in the same grand way he was wont to do at Montalto Castle! Lord! your honour's father, who does not fear the devil himself (St. John be our guard!) was as much afraid of the baron as a mouse of a cat—he was so grand! And it surprises me that Don Isidore does not know him, for all his coarse great coat, leathern belt, and long beard; but, to be sure, he is blinded by some charm! For my part, I know not what to do! I am afraid to tell Don Isidore, and I am afraid to let him remain unknown in the house, for God and his Holiness the Pope alone can tell what his designs may be; and though he was dearly fond of master when alive, who knows how the other world may turn his heart?"

"Pierot," said Alphonso, "keep this secret entirely to yourself; on no account let it go further! I will go and take proper means to find all out, and let you know. Meantime, be secret, I charge you!"

"Never fear, your honour; the world should not prevail on me to speak a word about it contrary to your orders! But, for the blessed Virgin's sake, let Don Isidore know soon, for I believe there is some ruination in the old baron's coming about the house!"

"Alphonso immediately flew into Don Isidore's closet to disclose to him and the baron the conversation between him and Pierot; and in order to make them more cheerful, he told them the whole, as it passed, but in a manner so pleasant and humorous, that they both, for the first time, relaxed into mirth, and gave way to a violent fit of laughter.

"The baron recollected the name of Pierot when Don Isidore mentioned him in his story; but as he was since advanced in years, he did not notice him when attending at dinner.

"It was agreed, however, to undeceive him with regard to the baron's death—to let him know the truth, and bind him down to secrecy.

"For this purpose, he was called into the closet.

"As soon as he entered, the baron advanced towards him, and, in a deep and tremendous tone, said to him:

"Friend, this youth informs me—"

"Here Pierot stood transfixed with horror—his face pale, his nostrils dilated, his eyebrows raised, and every other mark of a violent agony of fear upon him.

"With much difficulty, the baron preserved gravity enough to proceed.

"Dost thou know aught of me? Speak!"

"Ye—e—yes! That is, n—n—no!"

"Speak, and fear not!"

"Ah, Don Alphonso!" said Pierot, with a tremulous voice, "I did not think you would—"

"Speak!" said the baron again, with a voice that shook the room.

"Yes, your honour," said Pierot, hastily, "I did say to Don Alphonso as how I thought that your worship was—was—something—that is, a little like the deceased worthy Baron de Rayo."

"Here the baron took his hand, which—his mouth yawning wide with excess of horror—he endeavoured to withdraw, and, pressing it gently, said:

"And why not the baron himself, Pierot? Has age and this coat so entirely disguised me that you thought me only a little like Baron de Rayo?"

"Your honour, then," said Pierot, brightening, "is not dead?"

"Certainly not," said the baron.

"Don Alphonso," said Pierot, "did I not tell you a month ago that there was to be luck in the way, and that I dreamed of a coffin flying with black wings over a gallow's—a sure sign, as your worship knows, of good. But you are not dead?"

"No, indeed," said the baron, laughing.

"Then," said Pierot, dropping on his knees, "may God keep you so! It is true I told Don Alphonso that your fetch was here, but then I thought your honour was dead; and so—and so your worship knows that if you were dead you could not be here alive; and so I was not so much to blame. But, your honour, I was hugely frightened, although I am sure, though I say it, I would not turn my back upon e'er a he in the kingdom, excepting your honour, in fair living fight. But for the dead, I always abhorred to have anything to do with them!"

"Well, then," said Don Isidore, "you now know the baron to be living, and have no further cause for fear; so make it your business to see that he is properly attended

and served with the respect suitable to his dignity. But, mark me, let not, on thy peril, a single tittle of this discovery transpire!"

"I shall carefully obey your honour," said Pierot.

"It is very true," said Don Isidore, as Pierot retired, "a braver fellow, when opposed to men, never existed; but he is superstitious to an excess. Often has he persecuted—indeed, oftener diverted—me with his dreams; but mentioning of the dead seems to scare him. This is an unaccountable phenomenon in the human heart."

"Not at all," returned the baron. "He fears not men, because his senses are competent to judge of the danger, and apportion the power of resistance to it, in which case a boldness of nature gives him confidence and makes him estimate his own powers at the highest; but, in the case of spirits, his soul instinctively confesses the existence of such beings from false conception or early habit, attributes to them mischievous dispositions, while, being out of the compass of his sense, he cannot estimate their power, and therefore fears them. This, however contradictory it may appear to you, appears perfectly intelligible and natural to me."

"Next morning, Alphonso, passing at an early hour through the armoury, perceived Pierot hard at work.

"He had taken down the armour, and was cleaning them with all imaginable industry.

"What is all this for?" said Alphonso. "By whose direction is it that you take so much trouble?"

"Pierot, looking up in his face with a countenance full of sagacity and self-importance, said:

"We shall have rare doings now that the Baron de Rayo is here; he will be for tilting with you as he was wont with Don Isidore and young Henrico Gonzalvo. But tell me, senor, does the baron give any account of that sweet young gentleman? Oh, he was the flower of the country!—the cleverest, the handsomest—why, he was almost as big as the baron! Often—often, when I look at you, I think of him, for you are the picture of him, and so Don Isidore says. Ah—Lord help us!—where is he now? Have you heard, senor?"

"No, Pierot, I have not—not a word. But why this armour?"

"Why, there would be Don Henrico and your father, just when about your age—nay, before that—tilting, and lancing, and mook fighting, perpetually at it, and the baron looking on and instructing them. And now you shall see. I will wager my head against a truss of hay that before to-morrow night you will see this armour employed; nay, the old baron himself will be at it; but there is no armour to fit him."

"Alack, Pierot, he is old."

"Lord bless your honour, you little know what tough stuff the old codger is made of! I'll suffer our cook to cut off my middle finger and make a patty of it if I would not rather face any three men in our parish than him, old as he is. Only make him angry! Why, it was him that made Don Isidore what he was; and sure enough it was like master like scholar between them, for your father would fight the devil himself. There, at Algeiras, he cut his way through a hundred Moors, and brought intelligence to the King that saved the whole army from being cut off by the infidels. The King made a knight of him for it. I cannot tell you the particulars of it, for, if ever I talked of it as we rode together, he would stop me and blush as if he was ashamed of it."

"Well, Pierot," interrupted Alphonso, "I should not like to hurt anyone, but methinks war must be glorious sport. So grand—trumpets sounding—horses neighing—arms clashing—the King applauding! Oh, heavens—it must be delightful!"

"Where did you collect all those ideas, my dear—dear boy?" said the baron, appearing suddenly, "for surely you speak as feelingly, and as pertinently, too, as if you had been already engaged?"

"I have read of them, sir," returned Alphonso, "and I think I should like to try them."

"And try them thou shalt, my boy!" said the baron, embracing him.

"I wish the baron may not have overheard me," thought Pierot to himself, recollecting his expression of 'old codger.'

"Should you like me for a master, my dear boy?" said the baron.

"Indeed I should, sir; but I wish you had a better

office. It would ill suit you to bestow your time on a boy like me.'

"My dear boy," rejoined the baron, 'your father has consigned you entirely to my care, and in doing so has conferred on me the greatest possible favour. All my life used to arms, they will in old age be my best pastime; and perhaps it may not be unpleasant to learn that he who was your father's instructor in arms will be yours. This day, then, we begin; and with so promising a pupil, I have no doubt of doing everything.'

"That I will warrant you, old fellow," said Pierot, as the baron and Alphonso retired. 'If fighting will do, you will give him enough of it. By St. John of God! I believe the baron thinks that the Almighty made men for no other purpose but fighting. God have mercy on his old soul! I am sure it is time for him to think of something else; but I verily believe those fighting people think they are never to die, or that they have no soul to be saved.'

"With which words Pierot retired from the armoury, marking his forehead with a thousand crosses, and muttering as many pious ejaculations to the Virgin Mary.

"In a few weeks Don Isidore, according to a plan laid out by him, the baron, and Father Thomas, set off to Court, got the attainer of the baron reversed, and had special messages sent all over the kingdom, with letters from the gentry at Court, and orders from the King to the magistrates of the different towns, to search for Gonzalvo, his wife, and his child.

"By the King's desire, too, the Archbishop of Toledo sent despatches to all the heads of the Church throughout the country to the same effect.

"Thus the baron was able again to reassume his proper appearance, and had the consolation to think that if his children were living, there was a great probability of them being found, and to conceive a lively hope that he should yet press his grandson to his bosom.

CHAPTER DLXXXVI.

CONTINUATION OF THE STORY OF OLD TIMES.

"THE baron was surprised to find that his pupil had already acquired a considerable share of skill in the science of defence, and that he was an excellent horseman.

"His bulk and strength, too, were prodigious, considering his age; and the baron had reason to believe that he would one day ride foremost in the ring of heroes.

"In a few months, Don Isidore was prevailed upon to case himself in armour and enter the lists in mock fight with his son.

"Alphonso rapidly gained ground, and before the end of the second year Don Isidore pronounced him to the baron to be more than his equal in the encounter.

"His stature had enlarged to a size far above his father's; the puerile softness of his face began to harden into the firm features of manhood; the rude bulk of his limbs to form into most perfect symmetry; and the tender treble of his voice to increase into a strong, manly tenor.

"The heart of Don Isidore expanded with joy and raised him almost above mortality; while the pride and exultation of the baron sparkled in his eyes and gave new vigour and vivacity to his actions.

"If," said he, pleasantly, one day to Don Isidore—"if I continue to grow apace as I have done since I came to your castle, I shall be just of a proper age to go forth as Alphonso's squire at the time that he will be fit to enter upon the world."

"The sharpest afflictions find a period at last either in death or habit.

"Thus it was with those of the baron, who, though the messengers returned without being able to get the slightest trace of intelligence of his children, began to grow less wretched than he was.

"He found in Alphonso something on which to bestow his affection and employ his time, and the impression of his woes began to be insensibly effaced from his heart.

"The time when Alphonso should make his appearance in the theatre of life was approaching fast; and, as the first step was of the utmost importance, the baron, Don Isidore, and Father Thomas, held frequent conferences on the subject.

"But all their first plans were rendered abortive, and Don Isidore's happiness interrupted by an event as lamentable as it was unexpected.

"King Henry was suddenly cut off by poison, administered by the intrigues and jealousy of the Moorish King of Granada.

"On the accession of John, the son of Henry, to the throne, Don Isidore went to pay him homage; he was received, as the friend of his father, with distinction; and found the loss he had sustained in the late King's death in some measure supplied by the young King's choice of a minister and favourite, who was Don Juan de Padilla, a most particular and hearty friend of his.

"He therefore returned home more assured than he expected, and determined to send Alphonso to Court, recommended to Don Juan, as soon as possible, in order that he might be among the first who offered themselves as candidates for the favour of the young monarch.

"He accordingly set out, with all the appointments suitable to his views, attended by the trusty Pierot.

"On his arrival at Burgos, he delivered a letter from his father to Don Juan, who received him with marks of affection and esteem, assured him of his patronage and protection, and told him that he would take a proper opportunity to present him to the King.

"Don Juan was as good as his word.

"Sending one morning for Alphonso to come to him, he said:

"The King has, at my request, permitted me to present you to him, and has appointed this day for the purpose. He is young, of a charming temper, and most excellent disposition. He is already prepossessed in your favour, by gratitude for your father's service to the late King. You will find little difficulty, therefore, in making yourself agreeable to him."

"They went, accordingly, to the royal chamber, and were admitted to the young monarch, who, after a long conversation with Alphonso, and after having attentively examined his external deportment as well as his understanding, turned to Don Juan and said:

"Don Juan de Padilla, of all the young cavaliers whom you have hitherto introduced to me, this is he who fills up in my mind the most perfect idea of the true, gallant cavalier. His person is superior to any I have seen, and his conversation is a happy mixture of vivacity and good sense. Let him be near our person as much as is consistent with his honour and convenience."

"The early part of John's reign afforded the young Alphonso ample occasion to display his military talents.

"In various encounters with the forces of Portugal he carried victory along with him in almost every engagement; and, on the desertion of one of John's chief confidential officers, whose intelligence and knowledge of the Castilian army's situation might have given a decided advantage to the enemy, he pursued him to the hostile army, broke through a large body of those who surrounded the fugitive, seized him, and bore him through them triumphantly in his saddle back to the Castilian camp.

"When this prodigy of valour and prowess was announced to the King, he expressed his satisfaction in the most lively terms, and seemed to triumph not a little in his foresight and penetration in having at once discovered in Alphonso that superior heroism of which he had just given so striking a specimen.

"Peace being again restored, Alphonso became the constant companion of the King, from whom he received many flattering marks of favour, and among others knighthood.

"Among those youths of rank who kept about his person and laid claim to his favour was Don Rodrigo de Calvados, the son of a deceased nobleman, a favourite of the late King, and of Donna Maria de Guzman, sister to Don Pedro de Guzman, Don Isidore's father-in-law.

"By the address and intriguing disposition of his mother, he had been kept about the Court since his father's death.

"He was in his nature, subtle, pliant, fawning, and plausible.

"With those qualities he had contrived to engross much of the King's friendship to himself, till Alphonso stepped in, and almost without an effort engaged a share of it.

"Stung to the quick at the progress Alphonso made in the King's affections, and burning with envy of his superior accomplishments, he conceived the most im-

placable hatred against him, and wished for nothing so much as the destruction of his new rival.

"His chagrin became visible.

"His mother questioned him upon it, and he hesitated not to tell her the cause.

"The ambitious spirit of the lady could ill brook even a partial suspension of her views in favour of her son; her soul was up in arms, and her jealousy was as great of Alphonso's rising favours at Court as at the prospect he had of inheriting the estate of his grandfather and her brother, Don Pedro Guzman.

"The prowess of the youth made an open quarrel too dangerous an experiment; and surrounded as they were with crowds of spies, a plan of treachery was likely to be attended with equal danger, while his irreproachable conduct left nothing on which malice itself could ground an accusation.

"Thus puzzled, they knew not what to do, though they agreed that something must be done.

"It was a custom with the King to make parties of hunting, in which the ladies and gentlemen of the Court attended him.

"On such occasions they generally entered a great way into the depths of the forests where game was most plentiful, and there pitched tents for their accommodation.

"As it was now the season, the King ordered preparations to be made, invited a number of the gentry to attend him, and among the rest Alphonso Don Rodrigo and his mother.

"On the first day of hunting a large boar was started, which the King pursued, and, overtaking, was furiously assaulted by the animal.

"By some mismanagement of his horse, the King's spear missed the boar, who, turning short, with a rip of his tusk, gored the horse, which fell; and the boar was just repeating the blow when Alphonso stepped in between them, but in such a hurry that instead of piercing him through the breast he only opened a slanting wound in his neck, which rendered him more furious.

"The King, meantime, had disengaged himself.

"Alphonso, by a sudden and extraordinary spring, got from the boar before he could make another effort, and, meeting him with his spear, killed him on the spot.

"All this time Don Rodrigo stood at a cautious distance, complimenting the King on his fortunate escape.

"As soon as the company came up, every mouth was open at once, congratulating his Majesty on the fortunate issue of the affair, who, on his part, took Alphonso by the hand, and addressing the company, said:

"If my escape be an event from which you have derived any satisfaction, join in gratitude to him whose gallantry, under God, has effected it!"

"Alphonso was so overwhelmed with the compliments which were lavished upon him by all the company, that he could scarcely bear it; the goodness of the monarch was a weight too great.

"With difficulty he answered:

"If hazarding so worthless a thing as the life of Alphonso to save that on which the glory and happiness of a nation depend lays any claim to merit, I am overpaid by the success of the attempt! Do not, then, heap on me a weight I cannot support by thanking me for doing that which was my duty!"

"God forbid," said the King, "that we should set so little value on the services you have rendered us as your modesty would have us do! No, Alphonso, the gratitude of a King would be but poorly shown by mere professions. Your services shall neither be unrewarded nor forgotten!"

"Although Rodrigo and his mother were among the loudest in complimenting the youth, the new progress he had made by his heroism in the heart of the King, was like poison to their entrails.

"But when the ladies all expressed their admiration of his courage, beauty, vigour, and person, and above all, the modest dignity with which he received their praises, the malignant pair could scarcely restrain themselves; nor could Alphonso, had he known of their evil intentions, have wished them a greater curse than the company of their own feelings.

"What is there which a wicked woman will not do?"

"The aversion of Donna Maria de Calvados, which but for this late triumph might have remained smothered, now blazed with tenfold intensity.

"She riveted her eyes on him, and secretly wished that

they had the power of those of the basilisk, that she might look him dead.

"As she looked at him, she thought she beheld features that she had once been acquainted with.

"This worthy lady had, previous to her marriage with Don Rodrigo's father, seen and conceived a tenderness for Gonzalvo, when he was first brought to Court. Nay, she had made overtures to him, of which his attachment to the daughter of the Baron de Rayo would not permit him to take advantage.

"It is no wonder then that the resemblance which Alphonso de Haro bore to that Gonzalvo should be soon recognised.

"She was astonished at it; she thought it beyond the usual course of nature, and measuring her belief by her wishes rather than by the facts, she set it down that he was really his son, and upon that suggestion, idle though it was, formed a plan which she determined to put in immediate execution.

"She informed her son of her suspicions, on which she said that she was resolved to act as if on certainty, and charged him to co-operate with her in informing the King.

"To this, Rodrigo objected that his doing so might raise suspicions in the mind of John, for that he was so attached to Alphonso nothing less than positive evidence could shake him in his favour.

"The mother, aware of this circumstance as well as her son, now thought that an anonymous letter would be the best and safest way to try the temper of the King on the business.

"They sat down together, therefore, and produced the following letter, which Rodrigo contrived to have dropped in the King's private closet:—

"MOST GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN,—

"When treason lurks in any shape about your Majesty's throne, it is the duty of every subject to apprise you of the danger.

"A son of that traitor to the crown of Castile, the fugitive Henrico Gonzalvo, is now, under the false name of De Haro, near your sacred person. The old viper has eluded justice—crush the young one ere it stings you!"

"As soon as the King received this letter his esteem for Alphonso directly suggested to him the truth that it was the work of some envious enemy.

"He therefore sent for Don Juan de Padilla, and, first showing him the letter, told him his sentiments of it.

"Were not this artifice," said Don Juan, "too shallow for the genius of Donna Maria de Calvados, I should suspect her of being at the head of it; her whole life has been one continued scene of court intrigue, and she is most likely to be jealous of the favours you lavish on this young man in preference to her son, without considering the great difference in their talents and qualifications. As it is only justice to the youth the mask should be torn from the face of his enemies, I shall take the liberty to suggest to your Majesty a mode that cannot fail of discovering them."

"The young King, highly pleased, said he would join in it most willingly, and desired him to propose it.

"Order Alphonso to withdraw from Court!" said Don Juan.

"Order Alphonso to depart from Court?" interrupted the King.

"May it please your Majesty to hear me. The intrigues of your Majesty's enemies in the Court of Portugal require observation, and we have already agreed to retain some noble and faithful Castilian privately in your service there. Let Alphonso, under a feigned name, proceed thither among the rest, while I make it known that he is dismissed in consequence of this private admonition."

"And what end will this answer?" demanded the King, who did not relish the parting with Alphonso.

"Your Majesty shall know!" returned Don Juan. "When he is gone, your Majesty may express a desire to know to whose fidelity and good offices you are indebted for the admonitory letter, and doubt not but that, eager for personal approbation, they will disclose themselves!"

"The King immediately fell in with the plan of Don Juan, who sent for Alphonso, told him the affair exactly as it was, opened to him the plan, and concluded with telling him that it offered an opportunity of seeing Lisbon,

which would not only amuse him but contribute to his information and improvement.

"Alphonso appearing much concerned, Don Juan earnestly inquired if the plan were agreeable to him.

"Oh, no—no, señor," replied Alphonso, "but I am stung to the soul to think that I should have deported myself so as to make an enemy. But alas, this is a small concern!—the thought of giving trouble to my sovereign affects me most. What am I that so good, so great, so august a monarch should throw away a thought upon me? And what but injury can it be to me to discover who my enemies are, since I must necessarily revenge myself or despise them?"

"Noble youth!" said Don Juan—"you are irresistible; yours are the sentiments of true nobility; I almost wish I could indulge you; but the King has made the affair his own, and will not be contradicted."

"Little preparation was necessary for Alphonso.

"The King sent for him, took him into his closet, assured him of his eternal friendship, and told him that he expected his return as soon as he could signify his desire for it, which would happen when a proper discovery took place, or when it was despaired of.

"Alphonso threw himself at the King's feet, kissed his hand and bathed it with tears of gratitude.

"May no disloyalty or disaffection but such as mine," said he, "ever approach your sacred throne!"

"The King then, presenting him a paper to be delivered to Don Juan, and putting a costly ring upon his finger, bade him adieu.

"He waited on Don Juan immediately, who, reading the paper, told him that it was an order to pay him ten thousand piastres for the expenses of his journey.

"That night, Alphonso, attended by Pierot and two guides, set out for Portugal, and the next day it was whispered that the King had dismissed him in disgrace.

"From the first town, he wrote a letter to his father and another to the baron, informing them of the recent event, and desiring a letter to his aunt, the Countess of Leiria, in Lisbon.

"At the end of three days the guides left them, and he and Pierot were left to themselves.

"The latter, who was by nature sociable and loquacious, thinking the departure of the guides gave him a licence to converse with his master, asked him whither and for what end he was going.

"I am going, Pierot," said the youth, "to see that grand and universally-admired city, Lisbon, and to search for adventures, as a valiant Christian knight should do!"

"I cannot understand what your honour means by adventures!"

"I am going, then," said he, "to redress grievances and right wrongs—to protect, when it falls in my way, poverty and weakness against the violence and encroachments of the wealthy, the proud, and the strong!"

"God and the blessed Virgin prosper such intentions! To help the weak and the poor is good; but I doubt me your honour is too ready to fight for the strong and the great too! Now, although fighting be a very good thing on occasions when one is obliged to do it (and I can myself take and give a few hard knocks, as the saying is, when need requires, as well as another), yet, methinks it is a strange sort of a trade to follow, and very unfit for a gentleman above all others!"

"Why for a gentleman, Pierot?" said Alphonso, who liked his discourse.

"I'll tell your honour: When a poor fellow is reduced to get his bread by knocking others on the head, it is hard enough on him; but still, perhaps he can do no better; and if he endures hardship, or is knocked on the head himself, he may comfort himself with the thoughts that he might have endured worse; but here is your honour, who might be comfortable and warm at home, set out on a wild-goose chase to look for fighting, and after getting enough to satisfy a reasonable appetite on the part of the King, are now going, for lack of better, to look for more on the part of beggars!"

"But, Pierot, honour is as great a reward and as necessary to the existence of a gentleman as bread is to that of a peasant!"

"I should be glad to know," returned Pierot, "what honour there can be in breaking bones, cracking of crowns, or poking spears into fellows? I think it would be more honour to be sitting at home with your father, or

playing innocently with the old armour and the fierce old baron at home, at the castle of Querro!"

"But, Pierot," said the youth, "if some of us did not fight, we should become a prey to our enemies, and to all bad men who choose to wrong us."

"True enough, I say still, when it comes to one's hand. But why run our heads against stone walls, as the saying is? Your honour's father was as brave a warrior as any in Spain, but he was wise enough at last to go and stay at home in peace; and he has done more good and got more honour in one week since than he could have got in fifty years mad prize-fighting about the world. There is the old Baron de Rayo—why, I suppose he has fought more than a thousand tigers, and what is he the better for it?—what was his honour at last? Why, an old baize coat and a tune on the harp for his dinner. There was the noble Henrico Gonzalvo—he took a flight after honour, as you call it, and never came back again. Mark me, dear master, I am old, and can instruct from experience more than others from books. Honour is a very dangerous thing: it is like a ghost; you think you see it—you may catch at it, but you can never hold it fast; and, for my part, I have seen so much ruin brought about you all by it that I tremble at the name almost as much as I do at that of a ghost."

"Upon my word, Pierot, I had no conception that you were so ingenious a casuist! Proceed, for, notwithstanding your erroneous imagination, your argument pleases me."

"Well, then, your honour, there's Don—Don—Diabolo—oh! Don Rodrigo; he, too, is one of your men of honour. It seems that honour is got different ways, for the day you took a fancy to try how a wild boar's tusk felt, and ran so honourably between death and the King, Don Rodrigo shook from head to foot. I was near him. His face was the picture of death; and I plainly perceived other marks of fear, which I won't mention. Well, this Don Rodrigo is a man of honour, too. Now, the question is this: If honour be got by cowardice, is it worth the labour and danger of fighting for?"

"Pierot," said Alphonso, "with all your simplicity, you have put a question now that would puzzle a learned clerk to expound; but still, from mistaking the subject. If, as you say, Don Rodrigo be a coward—which I believe is only the effect of your imagination,—it must be considered as a misfortune, not a dishonour. It is true he is in that case not a man of military honour, but he may be a man of moral honour; and, being a favourite of the King, the presumption is that he must be in some respects honourable. For know, Pierot, that the roads to the temple of honour are many, and it is of little consequence which a man takes, so he pursues that for which he is qualified by nature, and makes true religion his guide, and a clear conscience his companion."

"Now your honour," quoth Pierot, "hath tied a knot with your tongue which you cannot untie with your teeth, though they were each as strong as that said boar's tusks. You say honour is your aim. Very well. There are many roads, you say, to honour,—no matter which you take. Then why not take the plain, easy, comfortable path home? There, with your father and your friends, by-and-by with a pretty wife and a parcel of children, blessing all the poor with your bounty, they blessing you with their prayers. Ah, señor, there would be honour—there would be glory! But this pate-breaking, bloody, cut-and-thrust work—a plague upon it, I say! It is inhuman, unchristian, and abominable, and I cannot abide the thoughts of it, unless, as I said before, it falls in one's way, and then I will make the best use of the arms God gave me, and defend myself."

"It was evening when this conversation passed between Alphonso and his faithful servant, Pierot.

"Just as the latter had concluded his last sentence, they were suddenly alarmed by the screaming of female voices at some distance before them in the forest.

"Alphonso, who, by the interruption of the trees, could not see the objects from whom the noise proceeded, spurred on his courser, and was followed close by Pierot, whose aversion to fighting was more the result of his reason than the dictates of his heart, and who in an instant forgot all his prudent apophthegms, and drove on his horse with as great eagerness as ever did knight of chivalry.

"After riding at full speed a few hundred yards, they found that the object of their pursuit had changed its

position, and that the screams were more to the right hand, and observed that they were growing fainter, while the trampling of horses plainly bespoke a flight, and convinced him that no time was to be lost.

"They therefore turned to the right, and pressed forward with all speed.

"For a considerable time they followed the noise, sometimes coming nearer, sometimes losing the sound, till at length they observed before them a chaise, driving full speed, and guarded by a number of men well mounted and armed.

"At this sight they pushed their horses harder.

"That which Pierot rode being swifter than his master's, which was of the larger and heavier kind, he got up first, and concluding how things were, rushed eagerly by the horsemen, and with a stroke levelled the driver of the chaise, and then with a dexterous blow gave one of the mules which drew it a cut on the back of the neck which laid him dead, and effectually stopped the progress of the whole.

"Then turning upon the horsemen, who had been already charged by Alphonso, they both laid about them with such fury, that after laying one dead and wounding three others so that they could not escape, they put the remainder to flight.

"Alphonso then came up to the chaise, and found in it two ladies, one of whom had fainted and was supported by the other, who demonstrated every mark of dismay and distraction.

"The veil of the lady who fainted was kept carefully down by the other, which Alphonso perceiving, said:

"It is my earnest wish, lady, to render you and your companion who has fainted every assistance in my power, but I fear my presence may, for some reasons, be at this time improper. I shall, if that be the case, withdraw, and stand within hearing till it may be your pleasure to call upon me. Meantime, madam, fear nothing; for be assured that he who has had the felicity to step between you and the violence intended you will protect your person to whatever place you may think it expedient to go for security."

"Pardon me, sir," returned the lady, after a pause, in which she viewed the youth with an earnest eye, "if, in the consternation I was in at the scene which has just passed, I should have confounded innocence with guilt, and conceived that we had been saved from one ruffian only to be subjected to the violence of another; but, as the courtesy of your expressions, the delicacy of your manner, and, let me add, the nobleness of your air, proclaim you incapable of dishonour, I shall not scruple to put myself under your protection, and entreat your assistance to convey us to a town not two leagues hence, where I shall be tolerably secure till I can prosecute my journey. In the meantime, I shall be obliged to you to order your servant to bring a drop of water to the relief of this young lady."

Alphonso immediately ran off, and in a few minutes returned with some water in his helmet, which he, with many apologies, presented to the lady, who, removing the veil from the face of her who had fainted, discovered to the astonished youth the most exquisitely-beautiful set of features he had ever beheld.

"But if he thought them beautiful while bespread with the pale hue of death, what were his sensations when, as life returned, expression and colour were restored to her cheeks; and when, opening her eyelids, she stared wildly around her, and discovered a pair of eyes so far beyond any he had ever beheld?

"He was lost in rapturous astonishment, while she cried:

"Oh, save me—save me—in pity save me from the tyrant! Alas! where are we? Who is this cavalier? But why do I ask? He is one of the duke's creatures! Yet surely he looks noble, and wears not the face of a ruffian! Tell me, dear madam, where are we? Are we safe? What means this pause of quiet, so different from that which passed but now?"

"Compose yourself, my child!" said the elder. "All is well! The perturbation of your spirits calls for rest; therefore refrain, for the present, from interrogating me, and content yourself with the assurance that we are safe as yet."

"Bely, ladies," said Alphonso, "upon such protection as I and my servant can afford you, and rest assured that

we will still defend you while we have life to move an arm!"

"It is not a few Portuguese that shall hurt you!" said Pierot, with a bow to the chaise, by way of hint to the ladies to be of good cheer.

"I already perceive that, my good friend," said the lady.

"Everything being arranged in the best manner circumstances would allow of, and the prisoners secured, the ladies and their gallant champions set forward towards the town, where they arrived at a late hour.

"The ladies retired to a chamber, while Alphonso and Pierot went to a magistrate, who despatched a guard to bring the wounded men, attended by Pierot to show the place.

"The ladies and Alphonso supped together.

"During supper, he sucked in the poison of love in such large draughts that he found little room for food, while the elder lady cursorily hinted that she was flying with her young ward into Spain to release her from the addresses of an importunate, amorous old nobleman of Portugal, whose influence at Court made it dangerous to offend him.

"She added that, finding her going, he had taken that violent method of procuring by force that which was denied to his rank, wealth, and solicitations.

"Alphonso paid her a handsome compliment on the generosity and disinterestedness of her principles; said that to give such youth, innocence, and beauty to the possession of old age, would be a crime worse than sacrilege; expressed his joy at having been instrumental to her safety, although he foresaw that his peace of mind for ever was the price at which he had purchased it; and concluded with a vehement declaration of love.

"The elder lady said that she hoped he would confine his discourse to such subjects as she could listen to; that, indebted though they were to his valour and generosity, their acquaintance was too short, their knowledge of each other too slight, the passion he had avowed too suddenly formed, to countenance either him in making such a declaration, or her in listening to it.

"She therefore entreated that he would be silent on that subject, else she should be obliged, however unwillingly, to retire.

"Alphonso bowed, and, for the rest of the short time they sat together, confined himself to the language of the eyes.

"Alphonso slept not the whole night.

"He tossed, he tumbled, he sighed.

"He formed a thousand strange, vague plans, every one of which he again rejected.

"At last he determined to discover to the ladies who he was, in order to secure a favourable reception.

"At daybreak he arose, and, calling Pierot, was by him informed that the ladies, after parting from him, had given orders for the chaise and fresh mules, and departed.

"Alphonso was in an agony of despair.

"He immediately took horse and pursued them in the route towards the confines of Spain till their horses were unable to proceed, and he found pursuit vain.

"Alas!" said he, "what a wretch am I to have seen such beauty, and to have it snatched from me in an instant! Ungrateful! No mark—no proof of gratitude or regard! Oh! would that I were dead!"

"As to mark—if you mean a token," said Pierot, "perhaps we have got one without their consent or desire. Look at this," said he, producing a picture of the young and beautiful object of his affection.

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Alphonso. "How—where—by what means did you get this?"

"Why, when the alguazils and I went to the spot where we rescued the ladies to look for the wounded ruffians, we could not find them; and, searching about closely with the lanterns, I found that picture lying on the ground, which I brought back with a determination to give it to the lady; but now they are gone, I am glad you have it."

"Thanks, my honest Pierot!" returned Alphonso. "Never shall this be forgotten to thee! For this will be some comfort—some consolation under my miseries!"

"They then turned back towards Portugal by another road, and without further accident reached the city of



[JACK SHEPPARD ASCERTAINS THE CAUSE OF THE LAMENESS OF HIS HORSE.]

Lisbon, where, to his great regret, he found that his aunt had, in consequence of the death of her husband, retired from Lisbon and gone on again into Spain.

CHAPTER DLXXXVII.

THE STORY CONTINUED.

"It was now that season of the year when the people of all Christian countries devote themselves to joy, festivity, and thanksgiving in anniversary commemoration of the birth of the Saviour of Mankind, when Alphonso set out from Lisbon on his return to Castile, in consequence of a message from the King, who desired him to leave Portugal and return into Spain.

"He had formed the resolution of seeing as much as he could of the country before his return, and therefore visited the city of Seville, purposing thence to proceed to Cordova, and so to Burgos.

No. 127.—BLUESKIN.

"He left Seville on Christmas Eve, and had already some near the ancient town of Corunna, when, hearing a more than usual noise of bells ringing, he demanded of a shepherd whom he accidentally overtook on the road what was the occasion of it.

"You must be a stranger to Spain, although you speak the Castilian tongue," said the shepherd, "not to know that to-morrow will be the nativity of our blessed Redeemer, and that on that account the bells are ringing."

"I am," returned Alphonso, "a Castilian and a true Christian, thank God, but a long journey and a variety of incidents prevented me from attending to the time. I knew it was the season, but was perfectly heedless of the day itself being so near. Shall I be able to reach Cordova to-night?"

"You may," returned the shepherd, "if your horse be able to keep the pace he is at and you happen to hit the right road, which, I assure you, is very difficult and very dangerous too, for there be so many roads before you, ran-

ning like your fingers from your hand, that you will be very apt to miss the true one; and the caverns and old Moorish towers on the ridges of the Sierra Morena are filled with bands of robbers. However, keep to the right of yonder brow that is topped with a broken rock resembling a tower. As you proceed by that, you will keep still to the right till you come near the town of Palma; keep to the left of it and you will probably meet some goatherd who can direct you, if not, God and our blessed Virgin be your guide!"

"As soon as they parted from the shepherd, Alphonso quickened his pace.

"If I were allowed to advise," said Pierot, "we should proceed to the town of Palma, of which the shepherd spoke, and there go to midnight mass, and on the morrow proceed with a proper guide to Cordova, for it is not alone the robbers of which he told you that we have to dread, but, this being the season when the fairies and all sorts of goblins are wandering about and playing their frolics, who knows what mischief may befall us? And if we should chance to be misled by any of those malicious demons and beguiled into those mountains which look a thousand times blacker than night itself, we might possibly fall into the bowels of some monstrous cavern or tumble down some of those frightful precipices with which I am sure those mountains abound."

"Pierot," interrupted Alphonso, "why should you, being a Christian, suppose that we have more to fear from demons, as you call them, at this season than at another? I should suppose that we have rather less. However, I am positively determined to proceed; meantime you may remain behind, and follow me at your leisure. Your fears might probably produce those very mischiefs of which you express such apprehension, therefore turn you into Palma while I push on to Cordova."

"Pierot said not a word, but followed his master, who pushed forward briskly.

"Night drew on apace, and they insensibly became shrouded in the bosom of a deep forest bounded on either side by stupendous mountains, which, rising almost perpendicularly, hid their heads in the skies, and whose rugged protuberances seemed to frown with savage aspect on the narrow path that wound through the wood below.

"The awful solemnity of the scene was increased by a rapid rill of water which growled down the bosom of a glen, and, bursting into a sudden cataract, thundered on the rock below.

"Senor," said Pierot, earnestly, "hear me—for the blessed Virgin's sake, hear me! Remember that a fool's advice has saved many a wise man from ruin. I warn you that we are going astray. Return, for the love of Christ, and do not run headlong upon your fate!"

"Peace—peace!" returned Alphonso. "Didst thou ever see a spot so calculated to call up ideas of sublimity and magnificence? Didst thou ever see so charming a night? The moon herself seems to assume increased splendour to chase away the obtruding clouds and shine with unobstructed lustre on the business of this night."

"Blessed Virgin!—what is that?" exclaimed Pierot.

"What do you talk of?" said Alphonso.

"If I live," said Pierot, "I saw the strangest sight—"

"It is your fear, not your eyes that saw it," returned Alphonso.

"Just as he spoke he descried a person of more than common size before him, who seemed walking hastily through the path of the forest in the same direction that he was going.

"He spurred his horse into a round pace in order to come up with him.

"But though he at last pushed him to a gallop, the object still kept before him, till, coming to an angle formed by a narrow road at the foot of a perpendicular corner of the hill of immense height, he turned round it and got out of sight.

"Alphonso, still quickening his pace, turned it also, and found a vast open plain, extensive beyond sight.

"Nothing was to be seen.

"He drew in his bridle, and stood bewildered in contemplation, while all was wrapped in a silence truly awful.

"He was lost in astonishment, and remained for some time in a state of doubt and meditation.

"At length, turning to Pierot, whose fears were wound up to a pitch of superstitious horror not to be described:

"It is not possible," said he, "that this delicious plain should be uninhabited, yet can I see no trace of human residence, and the moon is so bright that I think I should if there were any. I will holloa aloud—perhaps there may be some one within hearing."

"He then called out with all his might, and was answered by an echo which reverberated his voice a number of times, increasing each time in loudness, till at last it died away in the same number of reverberations again.

"Utter dismay seized Pierot.

"Alphonso was not perfectly at ease.

"Not a soul appeared.

"He waited many minutes with impatience.

"I will holloa again," said he.

"For the mercy of God, senor," said Pierot, "take care what you do! Let us call upon Heaven, and turn our horses back again into the path we came!"

"Alphonso perceiving no track on the plain before him, agreed to do as Pierot advised him, and turned towards the road from which he had wandered in pursuit of the figure.

"He had scarcely gone three steps, when the air was filled with lamentable shrieks.

"He stopped.

"They ceased.

"Blessed Virgin!" said Pierot—"where are we got, or what can those screeches mean?"

"So!" cried Alphonso, rather peevishly, "do you not perceive that they are owls, which fly in clouds about us?"

"By this time he again thought him of the road, and, being at the corner, looked out for it, and perceived many paths leading through the forest in that direction.

"While he was considering which of them to take, a sigh of deep anguish, heaved as from the bosom of a behind him, caught his ear.

"He turned his head and again saw the figure walking at an easy pace.

"He wheeled round his horse and again pursued, observing it attentively.

"It had a long spear in its hand, and glided with amazing swiftness before him.

"Stop," said he, in a loud voice—"stop, and I swear by the God of Christians you shall receive no harm!"

"Immediately the vast concave of the hills was filled all round with an echo which in the most awful manner repeated:

"You shall receive no harm!"

"The figure outstripped him, and again disappeared.

"Alphonso paused.

"Then, turning to Pierot, said:

"There must be something in this. Come of it what will, I am determined to proceed in this direction," and then spurred his horse forward.

"He had not gone far when the moon all at once became obscured.

"The most dismal darkness, interrupted ever and anon with flashes of lightning, which served but to make it the more horrible, succeeded.

"Rain fell in torrents, while the wind blew as if it would root up the surrounding mountains from their bases and filled the air with groans and hollow sounds.

"He spurred his horse into a gallop, throwing the reins upon his neck, and leaving him to his own discretion or to that of a superior Guide.

"He had not ridden long before he found his horse stop suddenly, and, looking attentively before him, thought that through the dark void he could perceive a high wall with battlements.

"He again called out aloud.

"A tumultuous noise was heard, and all at once he perceived several large windows, resembling those of a church, illuminated by a strong light from within.

"Concluding it to be a chapel lighted up for the purpose of celebrating midnight mass, he blessed God for the miraculous event which led him to it, and, dismounting from his horse, sought out an entrance.

"There was none on that end, and the place on either side was so closely enveloped in thick underwood and bushes that he found some difficulty in getting through them.

"He pierced through them, however, and found on the side a door open.

"He entered it, and passing through an aisle perfectly illuminated, found himself in the body of a magnificent church and very near the altar.

"He wondered much to find that there was no one in it, but concluding the priests were in the sacristy and the congregation not come, he knelt down to pray.

"Scarcely had he been in this position two minutes, when music the most heavenly struck up, and he heard the 'De Profundis' chanted by voices more than human, and the whole fabric shook with the notes of an organ whose deep tones equalled those of thunder.

"He heard but saw no one, and was riveted to the ground with astonishment.

"The music stopped.

"A bell, that seemed to shake the church to its foundation, tolled, and he reckoned twelve.

"The lights vanished.

"His ears were assailed with the most piercing sighs.

"A hideous noise, like the crashing of a vast pile of falling rocks, was heard.

"He drew his sword and offered up a prayer to Heaven for his safety.

"A noise, as of the flight of an immense pair of wings passing through the air, was heard wafting its heavy way round the vaulted ceiling of the aisle.

"The resolution even of Alphonso could scarcely support it.

"'Whatever thou art,' said he, in a low and solemn tone, 'that hast led me into this perilous and awful place, I conjure thee, by Him whom the Almighty this blessed night gave as a ransom for our sins, to speak to thy intent!'

"He paused for a reply, while his bristled hair stood erect upon his head, and the marrow in his bones froze as into stone, and his head, even to the deep recesses of his brain, felt as if congealed into solid ice.

"He heard the clashing of a sword against armour. His mind was wrought up to the madness of horrid expectation.

"And straight, a figure, such as he had seen, but rendered visible by a lambent flame which played about it, stood before him.

"It seemed far above the common size; but its aspect was rendered still more formidable by an enormous warlike plume that nodded on its helmet, and seemed reflected, as in a mirror, on the brightness of the armour in which it was cased.

"Excess of horror wound up the shaking spirits of Alphonso, and he put himself in a firmer posture of defence.

"'Whatever thou art,' said he, 'approach no nearer. My trust is in the Almighty, and if thou be wicked thou canst not hurt me. If there be aught that I can do—'

"The figure sighed.

"Alphonso's fear was lost in compassion and curiosity.

"'Fear not, dear youth,' said the figure. 'Reserve your sword for vengeance.'

"With these words the helmet fell from his head, and disclosed a countenance of majestic sadness, pale and bloody; while long redundant hair entangled with clotted gore hung in loose disorder over his shoulders.

"Again it sighed, then glided backwards till it reached the wall, which yawned and shut him in.

"Alphonso, his senses suspended between amazement and pity, by a convulsive impulse of which he was unconscious, darted forward and plunged his sword after the figure into the wall, which, closing, held it fast.

"He exerted all his strength to draw it out in vain.

"While he was thus engaged, a strain of music, more soothing than human skill could produce, struck up and lulled him by degrees into a sweet and gentle sleep, and he sunk upon the ground.

"The figure was still present to his imagination.

"He dreamed that it took him by the hand, and leading him through a number of dark and intricate windings, presented him to Baron de Rayo, saying:

"'To your conduct I consign him.'

"And then presenting him with a key, said:

"'Take this, consult the baron, and be resolute. Nor bolts, nor bars, nor walls of adamant, nor human fraud, nor human force can resist those whom God has designed to be the instruments of Heaven's vengeance.'

"On which the armour of the figure gaped, a skeleton fell from it in fragments at his feet, while the coat closed upon him, the helmet and plumes lodged upon his head, and he found himself armed *cap-a-pie*.

"Encumbered with the unusual weight, he struggled and awoke, and perceived that day had dawned.

"His first sensations on awaking were little more than a dream.

"He was bewildered in a maze of awe and wonder at what he had seen, and in strange conjectures on that which he had dreamed.

"He could hardly determine at first whether the whole had not been a dream, till looking at the wall he perceived his sword sticking in it.

"He caught it by the hilt, intending to use all his strength to draw it out; but it yielded to a twitch.

"In doing this he missed his ring.

"He sought for it up and down the floor for some time in vain.

"At last, recollecting the violence of his efforts in the night to draw forth his sword, he turned to search there.

"There was a small heap of rubbish lying under.

"He scraped it up in search of the ring, which he found.

"Just as he took the ring up, he perceived a key lying in the rubbish, and snatching it up also, saw that it exactly resembled that which he had dreamed of.

"'Gracious Heaven!' he exclaimed. 'To what mysterious agency am I thus conducted?'

"Then kneeling, and devoutly lifting up his hands and eyes to Heaven, fervently prayed for fortitude and wisdom proportioned to the great work, of which he saw himself likely to be made the instrument.

"Having thus prayed, he found himself unusually invigorated and cheerful.

"He looked around him, and was surprised to find the face of everything entirely different from that which he had the preceding night conceived it to be.

"He found that the church had been suffered to fall to ruin.

"Branches of the trees without were striking through the half-demolished window cases.

"Weeds were growing near that which had been the altar.

"The ceiling was pierced with holes and breaches, which served as nests for various birds.

"There were no doors, but one small one, which were not stopped up.

"He got into one of the windows, and saw a large space resembling a garden, but filled with trees, whose spreading branches, interwoven with each other, almost excluded light or air, while the bottom was choked with noisome weeds, briars and bushes.

"This place was bounded on the other side by a large building, which, though very high, had no windows in that direction.

"He again descended, and went into the aisle, which he found in the same way enveloped in bushes.

"He sought for the door by which he had entered, and with difficulty found it.

"It was a winding passage through a wall.

"A great gate—once the entrance—he observed to be carefully closed up, but it was in a different direction from the passage at which he had come in.

"He then returned to the chapel, and with a scrutinising eye observed the place where his sword had stuck, in order to mark it.

"He took out his book, and accurately noted all the particulars, the altar serving him as the great guiding mark.

"Then going out through the aisle and narrow passage, with difficulty made his way through the bushes, marking it carefully, however, by breaking down some large branches.

"After winding round the wall, he found Pierot in such a state of horror and suspense as human nature was scarcely able to support.

"'Had you stayed much longer, senor,' said he, 'I should have expired. How have you the heart to endure such things, I cannot tell. I am sure I'm afraid of no living man that ever wore a head; and yet, if my hair be not turned white with fear, I much wonder at it.'

"'Why, what now?—what has been the matter?'

"'Matter, your honour?—matter enough! Why, your

honour had not gone as long as I could reckon ten, when all the lights in the windows went out, and then I heard a clashing of swords, and then groaning, and then shrieks like those of unfortunate departed souls in trouble. I thought that the life would leave me. However, fearing you might have been attacked, I resolved not to act like a cowardly rascal, and got off my horse, drew my sword, and went round this wall. Then the noise ceased. I attempted to break through the bushes; but, oh Lord! if I am here alive, a thousand snakes began to hiss at me like red-hot horseshoes in water, so that I was fain, in spite of me, to draw back. When I returned to the place where I left the horses, I found that they had run off about the plain—a plague upon them! I ran after them, for the moon shone bright again, and a curse—confound the brutes!—they would not let me catch them till about ten minutes ago. I at last began to think of going in to look for you, and if I could not find you, to set off to Don Isidore's as fast as I could, to tell him the dismal news; but, thanks to the blessed Virgin, you are here, and, as I think, safe. So mount your horse, clap spurs to him, and, without once looking behind you, gallop away from this mansion of demons, fairies, ghosts, and devils! Lord, senor, are not you dead with fear? Make haste—make haste! And when you get out of the way of the demons, let me know what befel you; but do not say a word here, for they would set us all wrong in an instant, and keep us another night, perhaps for ever, in this abominable place, which looks somehow more black and gloomy than hell itself! Nay, I dare say that every step we move, we tread on the bodies of murdered people! Haste you, therefore, dear master of mine—haste you! Mount your horse, and let us be away as fast as our best legs can carry us!

"Pierot," said Alphonso, "I do firmly believe you to be, in an encounter with mere flesh and blood like yourself, as brave a fellow as ever Castile bred; but superstition makes you in other cases a coward to excess—I say to excess. What stronger proof can there be of this than your distaste to this place, which I solemnly declare I think to be the most charming spot by far that I have ever beheld? Here there is nothing wanting which can render the face of a country enchanting."

"Ay—ay!" interrupted Pierot. "God knows there are charms and enchantments enough in it! But, for mercy's sake, senor, make haste, and let us be gone before it grows dark! I dare say that the evening is approaching fast."

"There, again," returned the youth, "you betray the madness occasioned by your fears. Why, do you not perceive that it is yet scarcely morning? Even now the sun barely springs from the top of yonder hill, and, with feeble rays, shines upon us so obliquely, that our shadows reach almost beyond our sight. I cannot leave this cheering spot till I indulge my sight with more of its beauties. Methinks I could live here for ever. Behold how yonder mountain steep, almost perpendicular, rears on the south its huge, stupendous head to the clouds, and shields the plain below from the scorching power of the sun's meridian heat; while the earth, as if grateful for its protection, spreads at its feet a rich carpet of never-fading green! Look, again to the west. See where myriads of oaks and cork trees, ranged by the hand of Nature in gay and beautiful parade, one above the other, up the slope of that hill, spread, in kindly majesty, their arms afar, and join to form a canopy, unequalled in the palaces of princes, to shade the shepherd and his flock from the sultry evening's heat; and see, above them, on the grassy top, the shepherd now draws forth his flock to feed. This is not all. Behold where, on the east, the copious Guadalquiver rolls its majestic flood, fertilising the adjacent lands; while woods of olives, corn-fields, and vineyards cover its bosom with the wealth of Spain, and lovely orange groves fringe its banks with a rich tissue of green and gold. Oh, it is transporting! Here could I rest—here could I rest for ever!"

"Here a bell tolled for some time.

"Do you not perceive," continued Alphonso, "that, in the bosom of this thick wood, and beyond those stately ruins rising out of it, there must be a place inhabited? for that is the bell either of some nobleman's castle, or of some neighbouring convent tolling to matins? We will see."

"With this, he proceeded to mount his horse.

"Then," said Pierot, "if it must be so, it must be so. Come on, then; do as you like! It shall never be said

that Pierot lagged behind, or that he could not stand fire as well as another. No—no. If Pierot be not as well able as e'er an Alphonso in the land (begging your honour's pardon) to endure a flaking of fire, sword enchantment, or demons, let him never receive mercy!"

"By this time, Alphonso was mounted, and, turning his horse towards the west, proceeded slowly through the valley, looking ever and anon around him—stopping his horse and musing at one time, admiring the beauty of the place at another, making such observations as he thought necessary to a future recognition of it.

"He soon perceived, on his left hand, a rising ground resembling a moat, which started from the root of the mountain, and, turning his horse, ascended it.

"From thence he had a more enlarged view of the plain below, and could distinctly observe, at the back of the old buildings in which he had spent his night, and close to them, a building, which, from having a belfry, he concluded to be a convent.

"Beyond this he thought he saw, though indistinctly, marks of unusual cultivation.

"He therefore dismounted, and, with much pains, clambered up the rocks, behind from whence he could perceive a magnificent castle, with turrets, moats, drawbridge, &c., and an extensive demesne, in high improvement, behind it.

"He wished to see some one to whom he could apply for information, but all near him was a blank and silent desert.

"Come, hither, Pierot," said he, "and be comforted. See you yonder convent?"

"I do, senor."

"Well, alight and come hither, and I will show you something more."

"Pierot ascended to him.

"Do you see yonder castle?"

"That I do, your honour."

"Do you observe the turret and drawbridge?"

"I do, senor."

"Well, what think you now?"

"Why, I think as before and more so, on account of that castle, for it is there your devil's deeds are done. Ah, Lord! your great men with castles think no more of taking the lives of men than old women do of killing chinchies, or cracking fleas! Lord help us! Still I say to your honour, let us be gone, for there is no more mercy in those castles than there is pity in the heart of a witch!"

"Pierot," said Alphonso, "how shall we find out to whom that castle belongs? Suppose you were to go thither and inquire."

"Why, as to that," returned Pierot, "if your honour commands, I will go, though it were to the mouth of hell. But I would almost as soon lose my life at once. Nay, I am sure I should never live to return to you again!"

"Well, then, generous Pierot," returned Alphonso, "I will not command, nor even permit, you to go; but we will ride up through the wood to those goatherds who sit on the hill beyond it, and they, perhaps, will inform us."

"Overjoyed to be released from the visit to the castle, Pierot approved of the proposal with alacrity, and they arrived at the verge of the wood, which was so thick that a person on horseback could not make way through it.

"They therefore rode along it, and at last came to a path or narrow road, which, from its direction, seemed to lead up the hill.

"By this path, after many windings and turnings, he got to the open space on the top, where he saw not far from him the goatherds sitting at their breakfast.

"He rode up to and accosted them with his usual courtesy, which they returned by inviting him to take a share of their fare.

"He felt himself not disinclined to eat, and, alighting, sat down cheerfully to a meal of bread and oranges, with some poor wine.

"While he was making a hearty repast upon those, he inquired what was the name of that beautiful valley, and whose was the castle, when the eldest of the goatherds obliged him with the following recital:—

CHAPTER DLXXXVIII.

EDGORTH BESS CONTINUES THE PERUSAL OF THE STORY OF OLD TIMES.

"I AM now old, and have all my life followed the business of a goatherd, and of course must have seen vast numbers of beautiful places, but never have I seen any place to equal in beauty this very spot of Vallesanto; and this, senor, all men will tell you was its reputation time out of mind; and the richness of its pastures, the coolness of its air, the plenty of its provisions, the content of its inhabitants, the sanctity of its contents, and the virtues of the family who were lords of it, made it the topic of conversation in all neighbouring parts.

"The present lord of all the country you see around is the Marquess de Punalada, almost as old as myself.

"He came to the possession of the estate and castle at an early age, and was beloved by all who knew him.

"His fame was not confined to this valley, for there were few in Spain who did not hear of and acknowledge his greatness.

"He married a lady his equal in rank, reputation, and fortune; but in charity, piety, and all the virtues that distinguish Christians, superior to all the men and women of her day.

"They lived long together in the greatest happiness, and had two children—a son and a daughter; and all the poor rejoiced in the prospect of finding one day, in the virtues of the children, a continuation of the advantages they had already derived from the charity of their forefathers.

"Soon after the birth of those children, the marquess was called on by the King to attend him to the wars, so he went, leaving his lady and family behind him—and from that time Vallesanto began to decay.

"Captivated by the King's favour, he grew proud, and forgot his good lady and children at home.

"However, at last he did come—but so different a man in his conduct from what he had been that no one would have believed him to be the same person.

"The marchioness took it sorely to heart, and died suddenly, and he again was so affected at her death that he hid from company, betook himself entirely to the convent, and many said that he was going to take the cowl.

"However, after some time, he quitted it and took his children to a distant part, where the King had given him a large estate; and then there were reports that my lady's spirit appeared at night and made the castle uneasy to him.

"Be that as it may, he came here but seldom, and for years the children remained at his other estate.

"At last, however, he removed them here, and the cause that was assigned for it was so extraordinary that, if I had not had it from one of his own domestics, I should not have believed it.

"In short, the young lady had fallen in love desperately, and, what was worse, hopelessly—it was with a picture.

"It was said to be the picture of some man dead God knows how long.

"However, this did not satisfy the young lady, but she must go to a Hadador,* who told her that whenever she should see a man who resembled that picture the house of Punalada would tumble to the ground.

"Some of her attendants informed the marquess of this prediction, in consequence of which he hurried her off here and shut her up in a chamber of the castle, where she was watched with the utmost vigilance.

"No one had access to her but the marquess, the father prior of the convent, her brother, and some old domestics, for, having in his fury ordered the picture to be burnt, he had nought to give the servants as a guide, whereas, had he kept the picture, he might have compared all comers with it, and so perhaps kept off danger.

"As misfortunes seldom come alone, the marquess perceived a new turn in the castle which threatened not only sorrow but shame.

"In short, he found that my young lord, his son, had fallen violently in love with his sister, and was abandoned enough to make odious proposals to her.

"The unhappy young lady, to shelter herself, told the marquess, who directly put her into the convent, while he himself, racked with some inward affliction, shut himself from all intercourse but with the padre prior.

"Meantime, people gave their tongues a loose, and talked strangely.

"The place, even the convent, was said to be haunted.

"A chapel, in which mass was sometimes celebrated, was shut up and let to run to ruin.

"In short, senor, nothing but misfortune, affliction, and bad luck has for many years attended the family, and the place, and the neighbouring goatherds have forsaken the valley upon account of frightful appearances that haunt it."

"Do you mind that, senor?" interrupted Pierot. "Why, good man, as his worship and I were last night—"

Alphonso darted an angry look at him, and he was silent.

"As for the matter of that," continued the goatherd, who observed Alphonso, "the man can tell us nothing new, so your honour need not have any scruples,—there is more talk than you think of, and, in truth, the marquess is now, for his tyranny, wickedness, and moroseness, more disliked and suspected than he was ever beloved, for though we of this place be poor, we have clear consciences, and worship God and our Redeemer, and hate wickedness so much that we would not like a king that was bad.

"Castilians, thank God, are good Christians, and would not barter with the devil, though they were to gain worlds and their wealth by the bargain.

"But to conclude this strange story.

"The young man, instigated by the devil, abandoning all sense of religion and virtue, and running counter to the course of nature, finding himself unable to prevail on his sister to indulge an incestuous passion for him, determined to enjoy her by force or stratagem; and to this end, with large gifts and great promises, bribed a servant who attended her to aid his designs, and, as she since confessed, to put a sleeping dose in her drink, and let him in at night.

"As God who directs things for the protection of the innocent and the punishment of the guilty, would have it, all his plans turned to his own ruin.

"Her chamber was in the uppermost story of the convent, and looked into a court-yard.

"By means of immense bribes, he found his way into the yard, while his accomplice—the lady's servant-maid—let down a ladder made of silk, which he had supplied her with, and which she fastened above to one of the iron bars of the window.

"He ascended.

"But just as he got near the window, the ladder gave way.

"He tumbled headlong down, and was caught on the spikes of the railing below.

"Meantime, the jade above threw out the ladder and went to bed.

"In the morning, his lordship was found dead.

"The marquess was with difficulty prevented from slaying himself.

"An inquiry was set on foot, and the holy brotherhood extorted from the wretch a confession.

"Soon after, the marquess brought from Court a nephew of his, who is to inherit the estate, and hoped to marry him to the young lady, but she absolutely refused.

"Thus things remain at present.

"His lordship drags on a horrible life in his castle, and the young lady a wretched one in the convent."

"By the time that the goatherd had finished his story, Don Alphonso had eaten his breakfast, when, rising, and in the most courteous terms thanking them for their hospitality, and the old man in particular for his story, he remounted his horse, and, being directed in his road, took his departure, having ordered Pierot to give each of them a piece of money and the old man five.

"They had not gone far, when Pierot, taking advantage of his master's indulgence, began:

"And now, senor, what think you of this same Marquess de Punalada? Is it not better a thousand times to be dead than lead such a life as he does? And I warrant he is more careful of it, too, than you or I of ours, and so

* A fortune-teller.

it seems by his watching. And does not that show his wickedness? God help him—God help him! Bad as life is, he fears death may be worse. Oh, Lord—Oh, Lord! preserve me from the guilt of murder! If the devil so far got the better of me as to make me commit murder, I—I—I don't know what I should do! I would cut a hole in the ground, and bury myself in it! Murder? Oh, I freeze at the very thoughts of it! The greatest king in Christendom could not give life to a frog or a blade of grass! What must he be, then, who takes away the life of a christian? Yet—God help us!—such is the madness of the world, that nothing gets a man so great a name as killing another, and the more he kills the greater is his honour, as you call it! Ah, Don Alphonso, quit this life of war, and lead one of blessed peace, as a true christian should do!

"Upon my word, Pierot, I must allow that you apathematise most ingeniously, but I cannot see how that which you have said could arise from the subject we were talking of."

"What! does not your honour think that the marquess has been guilty of murder? The way he lives—the haunting of the place! Besides, whilst the old man was telling you his story, another of the goatherds told me as much as made my blood run cold. I may be wrong, to be sure; but I would not for all the estates and castles in Andalusia have the conscience of the marquess."

"At last they got into the high-road, and early that evening arrived at Cordova."

"Here Alphonso found himself divided between two duties, and debated with himself whether he should directly proceed to Court to the King, or go to his father's to throw himself at his feet, and, in conformity to the monition in the dream, to consult the baron."

"After some deliberation, he determined to trust rather to the tenderness of a father than the caprice of a Court, and accordingly went straight to Burgos, from whence he despatched the two following letters by Pierot:—

"To Don Isidore,—

"As I approached towards home, I found myself divided between two conflicting duties—one to my father, the other to my sovereign; and though my inclinations fought on the side of the former, prudence carried the victory in favour of the latter. The King honoured me beyond my merits, and this raised up enemies against me at Court. It is to obviate their machinations, that I delay the happiness of throwing myself at the feet of the best and most beloved of parents—a happiness, however, which I shall not deny myself many days. Hoping soon to embrace you,

"ALPHONSO."

"To Baron de Rayo,—

"A great and portentous incident, of which I hope soon to inform you, calls me to hasten to the Castle of Querro. It is such as I dare not commit to paper, nor know I whether it should be unfolded to anyone else, even to my father. I am obliged first, however, to wait on the King, and will soon as I can receive your benediction in person. It is a supernatural monition I have to communicate. I cannot, therefore, express my anxiety on that account, and am apprehensive of delays on the part of his Majesty. If you could prevail on Don Isidore to accompany you to Burgos, you might perhaps find the fatigue of the journey compensated by the strange, eventful history I have to relate, the clue of which seems reserved for you alone to unravel. I can say no more in this way. Turn this in your mind, and bestow your prayers on

"ALPHONSO."

"Alphonso was received with every mark of tenderness by the King, who informed him that the author of the anonymous letter was too wary to fall into the trap projected for him, but that he was fully convinced Don Rodrigo and his mother were at the bottom of it."

"In little more than a week after he had despatched the letters to his father and the baron, he had the happiness of seeing them at Burgos."

"The latter was anxious to hear the promised story, and closeted himself for above an hour with Alphonso, who gave him an accurate account of every particular,

not forgetting the goatherd's account of the Marquess de Punalada."

"The baron, after examining and questioning him over and over on the same particulars, at length was silent, and after ruminating for some time, desired Don Isidore to be called in."

"To him he made Alphonso again relate the wonders of Vallesanto."

"Don Isidore was astonished."

"It is," said the baron, vehemently—"it is the blood of Gonzalvo crying from the ground!"

"I own it is extraordinary," said Don Isidore, who, turning to Alphonso, sifted him with all his art, and confessed he scarcely knew what to say to it."

"Say to it?" exclaimed the baron. "We will act to it! Nor shall my soul find one moment's rest till the horrid secret is revealed. Don Isidore, your whole aid is requisite, and I demand it!"

"Don Isidore bowed assent."

"I request," continued the baron, "that Father Thomas may forthwith be sent for, together with one more attendant such as you can depend on."

"Juanico," interposed Alphonso.

"He is the very man I wish," returned the baron.

"Alphonso was astonished; he saw in the baron a new man. Youthful vigour reanimated every feature, enlivened every motion, and gave to his limbs a force, and to his whole air a formidable energy that ago never exhibits."

"Don Isidore was delighted."

"He once again saw that Baron Rayo that used at once to impress him with love and awe, and his soul again confessed the pleasing necessity of obedience."

"All shall be done, baron," said he. "Need I say that my hand, heart, and life are devoted to the accomplishment of your desire?"

"Yes—yes!" said the baron, striding across the room.

"The stains, the sorrows, the disgraces, the murders that have brought the house of Rayo to the ground—though they cannot be repaired—shall be revenged—most horribly revenged—and this arm shall be the instrument!"

"But, dear baron," interrupted Don Isidore, "repress this rising choler—overcome those emotions, which, indulged, may perhaps be the means of frustrating your views."

"Here," said the baron, "take that hand. Does it tremble? Feel this heart. Beats it a higher or quicker pulse than usual? No; that that you call emotion is the fixed temper of my soul—the unalterable condition of my mind! By Heaven! I will mince that viper, and grind him and his house even to the last clod of his generation into dust!"

"Don Isidore was silent."

"Alphonso felt an unusual trepidation."

"The baron seemed to tread in air."

"Pierot was again sent back to Querro with a letter to Father Thomas, who in eight days more returned, together with Juanico, to Burgos."

"Every necessary preparation was made, and they—that is to say, the baron, Don Isidore, Father Thomas, and Alphonso, attended by Juanico and Pierot—set out for Vallesanto."

CHAPTER DLXXXIX.

CONTINUATION OF THE STORY.

"On the fifth day, they arrived at the entrance of the valley, just as the sun was half-way dipped behind the western hill, on which Alphonso and his servant had before breakfasted with the goatherds."

"Don Isidore looked about him as he advanced, wrapt in delight with the beauty of the scene."

"Never," said he, "have I seen anything to equal it."

"They came to a little rill of water, clear as the purest crystal, which ran towards the river in some places, forming the most enchanting pools—deep, pellucid, and sheltered by hanging willows, and in others babbling over pebbles with a sweet and lulling murmur."

"Alphonso had not seen it before, having entered the valley on the southward."

"This," said he—"only this was wanting to make Vallesanto more than terrestrial! Let us cross it at this

shallow ford, and shelter us from observation in yonder clump of trees, while I point out to you the situation of the place.'

"They accordingly crossed the brook, rode up to the clump, in the heart of which they found a beautiful recess, of an almost circular form, concealed by a thickly-knotted underwood, from view; while an immense cork tree, which grew in the centre of it, extending its large branches, thick-set with leaves, afforded a roof almost impervious to the light, and which promised a shelter from the severest storms.

"Into this, after having dismounted, they entered, and led their horses.

"Alphonso then brought the baron, Don Isidore, and Father Thomas forth, and pointed out to them the perpendicular angular rock, the moat, and the wood, in which was buried the scene of their intended operations.

"The bell tolled. 'Twas for vespers.

"They returned to the thicket, where Father Thomas said mass, and all joined in prayer.

"When the bell tolls again," said Father Thomas, 'it will be time for us to proceed. The fathers will then retire to rest, and, by the time we get there, all will be quiet.'

"At length the bell tolled.

"The moon was quite obscured, and but a few scattered stars, but barely light enough to direct them on their way.

"Leaving the attendants to take care of the horses, they set out and crossed the plain directly towards the convent.

"As they approached it, they heard a foot before them treading with slow and heavy steps.

"They stood and listened.

"It stopped.

"They again proceeded.

"Again it was heard.

"Again they stopped.

"And again it ceased.

"It is the echo of our feet," said Don Isidore.

"Why not then of all our feet?" said the baron. 'It is but o. o. person.'

"A violent stamp of a foot, attended with the rattle of armour, was heard.

"We come!" exclaimed the baron, in a tone of terrific intrepidity.

"Then, turning to them:

"Haste you! Let us forward—we are called!"

"At length they came near the wall.

"Beyond this," said Alphonso, 'is the pathway. It is difficult to find it; nevertheless, I think I cannot fail of knowing it.'

"They walked slowly on.

"I see a light," said Don Isidore, in a low voice. 'Let us stop—we may be discovered.'

"I see it too," said the baron, 'but fear it not. It is friendly—let us get on.'

"He then advanced and broke through the bushes, his vigour and alacrity surpassing the rest who followed.

"Father Thomas brought up the rear.

"Let me," said Alphonso, 'go first, and find out the passage.'

"He groped along the wall, and found out the narrow entrance.

"Here it is," said he. 'Follow me!'

"They all followed.

"When they got into that part which he supposed to be the aisle, he said:

"Now I am at a loss to find the door into the chapel."

"I have brought a small lamp," said the baron. 'We will strike a light; but perhaps it may discover us.'

"A bell tolled, and straight the chapel within was illuminated.

"Blessed be God and our Redeemer!" said Father Thomas.

"They all said 'Amen' and entered the chapel.

"Father Thomas advanced to the altar, knelt and prayed.

"They all did the same.

"He said a short mass, and they arose.

"Here," said Alphonso—"here is the spot! Behold the mark of the sword!"

"At these words the light was suddenly extinguished, and they left in utter darkness.

"The baron then lighted his lamp, and, with Father Thomas, looked around.

"This," said the priest, 'is the west. Here must have been the great entrance, and, lo! it is stopped up! This, then,' said he, moving on, 'is the north; and what should bring this pile of rubbish here I cannot guess, for over it there is no mark of ruins.'

"That we will see," said the baron. 'Let us remove it.'

"He then drew a massy Moorish sabre from his side, and fell to work loosening the rubbish, while Alphonso and Don Isidore drew it away.

"At length the sabre met resistance.

"What can this be?" said the baron.

"He worked with his hand, and felt till he found a large chink.

"He put in the sabre and raised it up.

"It was a large stone.

"Here have been much pains taken," said he, 'to jar those stones together.'

"By this time he had got to the level of the floor.

"The baron picked away a layer of stones and found another.

"He groped again to find a chink, but all was solid.

"Alphonso knelt down and inspected it closely.

"It was an immense stone of four feet in surface.

"We must raise it!" said the baron. 'See if there be the smallest opening in which to insinuate the point of the sabre.'

"I cannot perceive one," said Alphonso. 'But here I see the upper part of a regular arch.'

"Where?" said the baron.

"Here—just where you removed the stones."

"We must remove that, too," said the baron; 'it conceals some deed which shuns the light! The Almighty can, if it so please Him, disclose the adamantine entrails of the earth, and shall He not give us strength to accomplish this?'

"As he spoke those last words he fell vigorously to work till he found the under edge of the slab of stone that opposed his passage.

"Having made a way for their hands, they all exerted their strength, lifted it on one end, and thence turned it over.

"Underneath was a flight of stone stairs going downward, filled with rubbish.

"As one only could work in so narrow a place, an affectionate scuffle ensued who that one should be, Alphonso and Don Isidore both insisting on the baron's yielding it to them.

"They were interrupted by a noise.

"They listened.

"A sigh, which seemed to burst the bosom that it came from, filled the chapel.

"The baron worked with redoubled ardour, throwing up the rubbish that obstructed the stairs.

"Alphonso beheld him with astonishment.

"The alacrity of youth and the strength of Hercules seemed united in him.

"Here is a door—" said he.

"A hollow sound within stopped him.

"He hearkened, and distinctly heard the rattling of armour, and the sounds of hasty footsteps running to and fro.

"Endue me with strength," said he, 'great Father of might! and tear up the rubbish as the enraged lion tears up the earth with his claws!'

"At length he got to the door, which opened outwards and was fastened within.

"Here," said he, 'is a door without a keyhole, or any visible means of opening it.'

"If," said Don Isidore, 'we could with a knife cut an entrance for our hand, perhaps our united strength might get it open.'

"Perhaps so," said the baron. 'But where is the knife?'

"Here," said Father Thomas.

"Don Isidore took the knife and descended.

"He cut for some time.

"The impatient baron snatched it from him.

"The wood flew in showers from his hands.

"At length they made room for their hands, and the baron, Don Isidore, and Alphonso tore it open.

"It was fastened by a chain hooked to a ponderous stone within.

"Just as they opened the door a most transporting peal of music struck up, and voices, more than human, sung the 'Nunc Dimittis.'"

"They entered, drew the door after them, and got into a passage, arched, low, and narrow."

"They went forward, the baron, with his sword drawn, leading the way, then Alphonso, then Don Isidore, and last, with a crucifix in his hand, Father Thomas."

"At the end of the passage they found the door bolted on the side next them."

"There must be some other way, that we have not yet seen, into this passage," said the baron, "for the door by which we entered, as well as this, was bolted on the inside."

"They looked attentively on either side, and saw none."

"Let us open this, then," said the baron.

"He opened it, and found a large, extensive cavern, filled with dead bodies in various stages of dissolution—some mouldered to dust, some half consumed, and some again in a more offensive state of putrefaction, lying on their backs with crucifixes tied erect in their hands."

"This," said Father Thomas, "is the cemetery of the convent. What shall we do here?"

"Hardly were these words pronounced, when their ears were assailed with a violent rattling of armour behind."

"They started and looked round them into the passage they had come through."

"Gracious God!" exclaimed Alphonso. "There is the figure."

"I see it," said the baron, looking at it with a fixed and unobtruded attention—"I see it! Oh, Isidore, dost not thou?"

"The tears rolled in torrents down his cheeks. He could not move, but uttered a groan that seemed to have rent his soul from its tenement."

"The figure stood."

"All gazed in a transport of horror except the baron, who seemed moved only by grief."

"It lifted up its visor."

"Oh, all ye saints of Heaven!" exclaimed Don Isidore. "Is not that Gonzalvo?"

"The baron put the lamp into the hands of Father Thomas, and advanced to it up the dark passage."

"Presently they heard the baron cry out:

"Speak—oh speak, Gonzalvo!" and instantly the crash of a heavy suit of armour falling to the ground."

"Come hither," said the Baron.

"They came up."

"Oh, Isidore," said he, "prepare yourself for such a miraculous event as will ever serve to remind you of the immediate agency of the Almighty, and strike scepticism and the reasonings of pigmy men dumb. Bring hither the lamp. Here we must enter."

"Why, this is a wall!" said the priest.

"We must enter it nevertheless," said the baron.

"The active mind and piercing eyes of Alphonso ended the difficulty."

"He found a low door, which, like the first, shut on the inside, but was opened with less pains."

"The foul and condensed air rushing forth blew out the lamp, and they were again in darkness."

"The young marrow of Alphonso froze with horror, and even Don Isidore was dismayed."

"The baron again struck a light, by which they found that they were in a small vault, arched overhead, and low."

"Alphonso struck his foot against something hard."

"He took it up."

"It was a short sabre, the blade of which was rusty all over but a large spot near the end of the edge, embossed with a large raised incrustation of rust."

"Take that," said the baron to Father Thomas, "and keep it by you."

"The light of the lamp was too feeble to extend through the vault, small though it was."

"They therefore searched slowly along, step by step, and by the dim light it afforded, took the best view they could of the place."

"As they went along thus round the walls, Father Thomas, who stood in the middle of the vault, imagined that he found the ground beneath him move."

"He struck it with his foot, and a hollow sound issued from it."

"He called the rest."

"Here is something," said he, "probably worth notice."

"They came over, and, standing in turn upon it, each found it spring beneath his feet, and heard the hollow sound."

"The baron, without a word, began to dig away the earth."

"He had not removed half a foot in depth when he found a board."

"They all immediately assisted him, and the earth was removed from a bed of plank of several feet in surface."

"They tore it up, and beneath found a chest, in which was deposited a skeleton, the flesh of which was quite mouldered away."

"It was obviously that of a man of extraordinary stature."

"The baron touched it, and it sunk beneath his hand."

"He hung over it for some time."

"Is there not another," said he, "along with it?"

"They moved the earth about it; but there was none."

"They then turned to the chest again."

"The priest took the skull, which was not quite disengaged from the trunk, till he stirred it, and, attentively viewing it, he perceived that it was cloven across behind."

"The baron, looking at it, and showing it to Don Isidore, asked him rather sternly if he recollected anything about a dream."

"Don Isidore bowed in humble acknowledgment."

"The priest, whose curiosity on this occasion seemed greatest and most observant, felt round the chest, inspected the bones, the clothes, and every part of it."

"At length he said:

"Here is something more than flesh and bones."

"It was a seal ring."

"He presented it to the baron, who, looking at it attentively for some time, exclaimed:

"Oh, God!"

"Then, handing it to Don Isidore, said:

"Dost thou know this device? What say reason and scepticism now?"

"Don Isidore looked, started, and breathed short."

"Do I know it? Yes, on my soul, this is the ring of Gonzalvo. Here is his device, too, a hand and dagger, with *Justar Fulminis*, his motto."

"Well, Don Isidore," said the baron, "are you now convinced?"

"Although this be sufficient to convince me," returned Don Isidore, "I think we should leave no means untried to obtain every testimony this place can afford. Let us search further."

"I intend it," said the baron.

"He accordingly led them again, beginning at the door, round by the wall, viewing with closest inspection the ground, and stamping upon it to find whether it was hollow."

"At length they came to a heap, as they thought, of earth."

"The baron struck it with his foot."

"A helmet, and a coat of mail rolled about the floor."

"The baron took up one part, Don Isidore another."

"It is the armour of a giant rather than a common man," said the priest."

"It was my son's," said the baron. "Father, lend me your knife."

"He took the knife and scraped away the rust."

"Behold," said he, "our family device! And here read."

"They read aloud '*Justar Fulminis*.'"

"Yes—yes, my child!" said the baron, vehemently. "A thunderbolt thou wert to thy enemies, but treachery beguiled and deprived thee of thy precious life, and now that arm which carried terror to the enemies of Castile and victory to its banners is fallen to a clod of the valley!"

"Here the baron's anguish, like a stream long stopped in its course, burst in a torrent of tears and groans, which seemed to shake the arches of the vault."

"For some time he was silent."

"At length, turning to Don Isidore and Father Thomas, he said:

"Lay them as they were till all is ripe, and then shall



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES TAKE SHELTER IN THE HERMIT'S CELL.]

the arms of Rayo burst like a thunderbolt upon the heads of the guilty! Let us proceed.'

'They then went further and found a leathern portmanteau, much decayed and full of insects.

'The baron strove to open it.

'It broke in pieces, and a silver-hafted dagger, with the aforesaid crest, a crucifix studded with rubies, and some papers fell out of it upon the ground.

'The baron searched it further, and in a private flap of it found a number of papers.

'Those papers,' said he, 'reverend father, together with this cross, and dagger, and the ring, we confide to you, requesting that you will seal them up. And you, Don Isidore, will witness the transaction till justice calls them forth.'

'They reckoned the papers, Don Isidore and Alphonso writing their names on each, and the priest took possession of them.

'Although no more be necessary now, and it draws No. 123.—BLUESKIN.

fast towards morning,' said the baron, 'let us leave nothing unexamined.'

'They searched round with the most scrupulous exactness.

'Not a spot, not a flaw in the floor or the walls, escaped their notice.

'While they were thus engaged, the young Alphonso—who was walking to and fro, busied in contemplating the scene before him, and felicitating himself with the thought that he had contributed to the disclosure of such a horrid affair—struck the hilt of his sword against a part of the wall, which sounded very hollow, and apprised them of it.

'They brought the lamp.

'Assuredly,' said the baron, 'my-daughter was not spared. Perhaps there may be another depository of the dead here.'

'He knocked at the wall—

'Felt it—examined it; and the more they advanced in a particular direction, the more hollow it sounded.

"At last they touched a door so neatly fitted that it seemed to be a part of the wall, but crevice or joint they could discover none.

"Determined, however, not to leave it unaccomplished, they persisted—the priest scraping and probing with his knife, and the baron with his sword; while Alphonso, looking lower, discovered a keyhole.

"Let us cut it here," said the priest.

"Hold!" said the baron. "For this, perhaps, our Alphonso has already found a key."

"Then, taking forth that which Alphonso had found, in pursuance of the monition in the dream, he tried it, and the lock flew open.

"Here," said the baron, "let us look with humble adoration to the Great Disposer of events, and henceforth let wonder cease. His ways are in the great deep, and not to be searched out; yet man—puny creature—will estimate heavenly things by earthly calculations, and doubt of the extent of the power of the Almighty only because his feeble reason cannot comprehend it!"

"Just as he was opening the door, Father Thomas stopped him.

"Hold!" he said. "We go on without considering how many hours have elapsed since we entered into these buildings. Morning approaches; I fear that day has already dawned. Discovery might ruin all; therefore, let us be gone."

"You say well," said Don Isidore. "It must be day-break."

"Alas!" said the baron, "much remains behind! Shall we go? Yet it must be."

"Were I permitted to advise," said Don Isidore, "we should immediately depart, carefully laying everything in such a manner as, if searched, to baffle suspicion."

"They accordingly covered up the chest with the earth, Father Thomas devoutly pronouncing the 'Las Animas' over it.

"They then closed the door of the vault, proceeded next to the steps up to the chapel, where, closing the door, and laying down the large stone, they put the whole, as nearly as they could, in its former state, and departed.

CHAPTER DXC.

'CONTINUATION OF THE STORY.'

"THEY arrived at the bower just as distant objects were rendered visible by the increasing light of the morning.

"There they found their attendants anxiously expecting their arrival, having suffered much from apprehension, as well as cold.

"Everything now, however, tended to cheer and repay them for the hardships of the night.

"The rising sun by degrees chased away the cold, and rendered the air most exquisitely refreshing.

"Ten thousand birds filled the air with the harmony of nature.

"From the distant hills was heard incessantly the bleating of flocks innumerable; while the goatherds' pipes, and now and then the barking of their dogs, broke in occasionally, and finished the picture of this new Arcadia.

"After having refreshed themselves with some bread and wine which they had brought with them, they mounted, and set forward towards Burgos, repassing the river.

"The baron mused for some time.

"At last, breaking silence, and turning to the others behind him:

"Behold," said he, "how magnificently the hand of the Creator has furnished the abodes of all his creatures! Not all the embellishments of art, strained to the last nerve of human skill—not all the proud domes raised story over story by the aspiring hand of architecture—not gilded ceilings, burnished arches, columns of polished marble, gold or silver, moulded by the hand of taste, and inscribed with the proud emblems of nobility—can be put in comparison with this one small speck in the works of Omnipotence; nay, let but the hand of art touch it, and its beauties vanish. Hark! every throat of the pretty feathered tribe swells instinctively with notes of grateful adoration; the flocks bleat forth their praise; the noble ox, his appetite and mere corporeal functions all suspended in mute devotion, contemplates the beauties that

surround him, heaves his huge sides with rapture, and in enjoyment pays his tribute to the hand that feeds him! Man—only man—swollen with the pride of reason (that dubious instrument by Heaven given, his blessing or his curse)—becomes the bubble of creation—sinfully spurns from him gifts like those, and to his own gaudy, perishable works resorts for satisfaction;—worse!—strains his prolific mind for means to desolate the face of fair creation—for spurious pleasures, which baffle in pursuit or poison in enjoyment, wages inexorable war against the will of Heaven; spreads his own brother's couch with serpents' teeth; ravages—ruins—murders!"

"Just as he had pronounced these last words, they came to a beautiful recess, resembling a stage, formed by the hand of nature at the foot of the mountain.

"Round it hills rose in a gentle slope, like the seats of an amphitheatre, and in the centre of it stood a large stone cross.

"The whole was surrounded by a prattling rivulet, which fell from the hills behind in a beautiful cataract. At the bottom, separating into two branches, it glided round this natural stage, and, meeting again below in one stream, fell into the river Guadalquivir at the distance of about a league.

"The whole was surrounded by stately cork trees, which lent a cool shade from the intense heat of the meridian sun.

"In this romantic spot was collected a crowd of men and women, dressed in all the fantastic finery of the country, and bedecked with boughs and flowers.

"One man, who seemed the chief, carried a garland in his hand, and, mated with a beautiful female, led them all in mazes through a dance.

"Don Isidore stopped and looked on.

"Nothing," said he, "delights me so much as an assemblage of happy faces."

"The dance stopped, and the people saluted our travellers with rustic civility.

"Pr'ythee," said Don Isidore, "what is the occasion of this mirth and dancing to-day? Is it your tutelar saint's day?"

"Why, you must know, senor, that the village you see yonder is called Vallesanto. It has been in the possession of the present family ever since the expulsion of the Moors from this part of Spain; and if the blessed Virgin condescends to hear the prayers of its inhabitants, it will continue so for ever; for never were people so blessed as they are in a lord, and never was a family so blessed in return as they—if good works, the prayers of mankind, the smiles of Heaven, and being true Christians can make them so. Search out the best man in Spain, and we will set the worst of this family against him, and not be afraid of the comparison; and of all them that ever possessed the estate, the present marquess seems the best, for to the natural greatness of his blood and the hereditary goodness of his heart, he unites the gifts of his good uncle Jerome, prior of our convent, under whose care he was bred. You need not doubt, then, his being a good Christian, which, you know, is saying everything. As soon as he came of age, instead of lavishing the great wealth he got into possession of in feasts, and revels, and riots, in horses, dice, cards, or women, he laid it all out in charity, reserving to himself no more for his expenses than the poorest hidalgo in the country. He provides for the old and infirm, gives instruments of husbandry to young farmers, and tools to young tradesmen; he gives portions to young maids to procure them good husbands, and on their marriage supplies them with a capital to set them going. Not a person in the country but can bear testimony to his charity. Even the little children flock about him as he walks the street, skipping for joy like young lambs after their dams, and get their quarto or ocharo to regale. In short, senor, nothing—not even the brute creation—fails to find tender protection and shelter from him. Well, sir, this day he is to be married. The whole neighbourhood is in one tumult of joy—grandeos come from all parts of the country—even the Marquess de Punalada, who has lived like a hermit since the death of his wife, comes forth to add to the meeting. All strangers passing are invited; and the marquess and his uncle will both be much pleased, and think it a great favour, if you cavaliers would delay your journey, and go to the Castle of Villaverde."

"That is impossible," said Don Isidore; "business of

consequence obliges us to return with haste. We wish the worthy marquess all the felicity such virtues merit. I thank you, however, for the pains you have taken to inform me, and request that you will accept this (giving him a piece of money), and make merry with it on another occasion."

"Then, turning their horses, they proceeded on their journey.

"They had not gone far when they observed an inn which stood just at the point of two roads.

"Here they resolved to refresh themselves after the fatigues of the night.

"They accordingly stopped, and, having retired into a private room, held a conference on the subject of the night's adventures.

"From what we have seen," said the baron, "no doubt remains of the truth of my suspicions. That Gonzalvo has been murdered most foully is certain; that the skeleton in the chest is his, the ring is sufficient, not to mention the cloven skull, the portmanteau, and the armour; and that the Marquess de Punalada has been the murderer is little less than a matter of certainty."

"They all assented to those propositions.

"The questions then to be resolved are—

"First, how it has happened that the priory should be made the scene of slaughter—a place, one would think, too holy for such deeds of darkness?

"Next, what provocation or inducement brought on the murder; and, lastly, what has been the fate of my daughter?"

"All these things remaining still in obscurity makes me wish to return to-night to the vaults. Perhaps we may discover further.

"In my opinion," said Don Isidore, "the development of all you mention hangs entirely on the discoveries we have already made. Instead, therefore, of making an unavailing journey to the vault, we should, in pursuance of our first plan, proceed to Court and give the King a full and circumstantial relation of the facts from the beginning."

"And desire him," said the baron, "to open the lists, and permit me to call the villain to a public vindication of himself in single combat."

"I think that you mistake me yet," interrupted Don Isidore. "Single combat, indeed! No, far be it from me to think of staining the noble warrior's sword with the blood of a murderer! No, let justice—"

"Hear me, Don Isidore," interrupted the baron—"hear my fixed resolves. He must fall by this arm. I cannot become an assassin or an executioner, therefore I must fight him. Fear not thou the event; in such a cause, a pigmy's arm would wrest a victory from a giant. Besides—but thou thinkest that I am old—too old—I may be so, but know, Isidore, that even at this age that man bears not arms in Spain from whose crest Rayo would not now—even now—old though he be, hope to pluck the laurel!"

"My dear baron," returned Don Isidore, "I must say you still mistake me. Of the event of the combat I have no doubt; and if, as you seem to surmise, I had any, that arose from an apprehension of your age, I should—and I hope you believe it—step forward myself as the champion of our cause. The process you propose would smother future discovery, and many things of greatest moment—perhaps even your daughter's life (for who knows but she yet may live)—might all be lost in this one rash act. Consider, baron, it is not a mere point of honour you have to discharge—it is not a doubtful claim on justice you have to enforce; you are not so destitute of proof as to resort to the sword—no, your proofs are already in your reach, and justice to your family demands that your oppressor should be brought, not to an honourable issue of the sword, but to the ignominious sentence of the law. As to your age, baron, it has nothing to do with it, for, in a case where the demands of honour called forth the sword, I know not the hand more fit to draw it than yours. If it failed, and mine should sink after it, remember that I have a son—"

"Ay, Isidore, you have a son—such a son as I once had—one to whose arm the fate of empires might be trusted. But, believe me, you have shaken my intentions for the present. My daughter may live—said you not so? Look you, Isidore; accustomed as thou hast been to read my heart, which ever has been written in my actions, thou canst not but have observed how much more precious than life—nay, than ten thousand lives—has honour ever been

in my opinion. Yet would I, to make good that one transporting hope—to save my daughter, to hug her once more in these arms—give life, fame, fortune, and everything to the winds—forego all honours, all worldly hopes, and take the fate of the most forlorn wretch that draws existence from the pity of mankind! But it may not be. She must be gone—she was not spared!"

"However," said Don Isidore, "though unlikely, it is not impossible. Is it not better to proceed by such temperate means as may insure our work at least from further mischief? I say, then, we must desire the interference of the King, and even this must be done with caution, for Don Rodrigo is nephew and presumptive heir to the marquess; and his mother, who is above all women crafty, may, by circumspection, discover, and, by address, defeat us. My advice, therefore, is that we repair to Burgos, and that Alphonso gain a private audience of the King, and prevail upon him to grant you a hearing, in which case there does not remain a doubt of justice being done."

"Father Thomas and Alphonso added the weight of their opinion to this advice, and the baron agreed.

"Meantime," said Don Isidore, "let us take some refreshment, remain here this night to rest, and early to-morrow morning set forward on our journey."

"Just at that moment they observed from their windows a cloud of dust arising at a distance and moving towards them.

"They soon heard the trampling of horses, and presently saw a carriage, drawn by six mules and surrounded by armed men.

"It drove by the inn, and turned towards the town of Villaverde.

"They called their host, and asked him whose it was.

"He answered that it was the Marquess de Punalada, 'who, for a wonder,' said he, 'appears abroad, going, I suppose, to the wedding. Ay, ay, he has armed men enough to keep off the ghosts. Oh, Lord save us and keep us a clear conscience!'

"This marquess, then," said Don Isidore, "is much afraid of ghosts, is he?"

"Afraid, senor? Why, he is the talk of the whole country," replied the host. "We have sometimes such work with him. It was but a few nights ago he called up all the servants in the middle of the night, said that some one was going to kill him, made them arm themselves and search all round the castle, and at last could not be persuaded but that some person had come to him as he lay in bed and shook a bloody poniard over him, threatening him with speedy death.

"He keeps almost continually locked up in private places, and never walks even in the great gardens, though walled with battlements, without two chosen domestics."

"Sometimes he disappears for days together, and is not seen by anyone, and the people of the castle think that he is then with Father Gregorio, the prior, though how he gets there they cannot tell, as the walls of the castle are between them.

"Be this as it will, one of the lay brothers saw him once in the prior's cell at a time that he had not passed the gate.

"Some say that he deals with the devil. Some say one thing, and some say another. Some talk of my lady's death; but as for me, senors, remember, I say nothing.

"Besides, now I think on it, you are strangers to me, and might do me mischief; but, thank God, I can keep a secret!"

"We," returned Don Isidore, "are above doing you a mischief, and hope you will not think so ill of us; so, if you have a secret—"

"Lord, no, your honour—no secret! What everyone knows is no secret. Why, he screeches, and talks to himself, and says the wickedest things, when he thinks that no one is in hearing—such as that God cannot pardon him, and the like. Despair, you know, is one of the seven deadly sins. As for my part, I would not take the wealth of Spain to be in his skin this night, for, though I do keep an inn, I am an honest man, and never committed murder."

"Murder?" exclaimed Don Isidore. "Why, did the marquess?"

"No, no, your honour—oh no—not as one would say! God forbid I should say so! But, then, when a man is afraid of his own shadow, and shrieks—"

"I understand you," said Don Isidore, touching his

lips with his fingers by way of denoting silence. 'You are a wise fellow, and I commend you.'

"But, senors," continued the host, quite flattered, 'only think of his immuring his daughter, a sweet young lady, in a cell of a convent only out of fear of a prophecy of a cursed witch. But that cost his son his life, who was—but God forgive him, he's dead! Then there is a poor youth he has bred up for charity. Some say he is his own bastard; but I cannot believe it—he is too good for that. Be that as it may, he treats him cruelly. Sometimes, when he meets him, he screeches and orders him to be turned out, then again sends and has him brought back, for the lad would be glad to go. And would you believe it, one day, about four days ago, he was missed; messengers were sent in search for him; they found him in a broken building behind the convent, where he was looking for birds' nests; and only think, the marquess was going to poniard him, and at last laid him in irons, calling him villain, cut-throat, traitor! Lord help us, the boy would not cut the throat of a chicken, though he wanted his dinner by it; not but the fellow is brave enough, for now that he's grown he's as strong as a mule. It is not six months since a great gang of robbers descended the Sierra Morena, and plundered the whole country, carrying away everything, cattle, corn and all. The marquess was then abroad, that is to say, buried in his castle. What does the young Fernando do but claps on a suit of armour, and at the head of a few peasants sallied forth, attacked the banditti, took their chief and kept him in bondage at a small village till all they had remaining of the stolen property was restored. The marquess, being informed of it, sent to have the fellow detained just as all was returned; but Fernando said that he had already passed his word, and would send his sword through anyone who should presume to detain him, adding, that it was better to have the things restored to their poor owners than to hang such a worthless wretch, and then dismissed him with an earnest exhortation to reformation and repentance. All people were astonished at the grandeur of his sentiments, particularly as he was a foundling, and as the saying is, begot in sin. But as soon as he went home, the marquess became outrageous, threatened him with death, laid him in irons, and kept him on bread and water for a month. When set at liberty, he walked about sad and silent, and spoke to no one. One day sauntering down a long lobby in the castle, the marquess suddenly opened a room door just facing him, screeched, and almost fell into fits at the sight of him. The castle was alarmed. His lordship declared that he was watching there to assassinate him. The youth called Heaven to witness his innocence, and begged that he might be permitted to withdraw from the castle and ease his lordship's mind, who seemed to abhor the sight of him; assuring him that though grateful for past favours, he was weary of such continual illusage, upon which the marquess swore he should never go outside the walls of the castle, and gave orders for his being strictly watched. Ever since, he remains there as it were a prisoner. He is seen sometimes walking on the battlements attended by two men as guards. No one can tell the cause of this, but everyone knows it can be nothing good.'

"You interest me much in the fate of this youth," said Don Isidore; 'and your account astonishes me beyond measure. There is something in the marquess's conduct to him so far surpassing the bounds of common malignity that, coupled with his terrors and screechings, denotes some guilty mystery.'

"Why, senor," said the innkeeper, 'he seems almost as much afraid of everybody—nay, for matter of that, of himself, for he cannot abide to be alone at night. Indeed, most of the domestics are terrified at night, and declare that the whole castle and its gardens, nay, the whole priory and valley, are haunted!'

"Here he was called, and obliged to leave his company and his story unfinished.

"A strange account this!" said Don Isidore.

"A very natural one," said the baron.

"I cannot account for it," said Don Isidore; 'but I feel a propensity which I cannot overcome to go towards the castle and take a view of it. The unmerited fate of that youth—who, from our host's account, seems to have something noble in his soul—fills me with, I cannot say how, an ardent wish to see him. Were I superstitious, I should deem those desires predictive. Perhaps—nay, it cannot be—'

"What?" said the baron, hastily.

"In truth," replied Don Isidore, 'my thoughts were so absurd that I almost blush to own them. If this should be your orphan grandson?'

"A flush of red crimsoned the cheek of the baron.

"What if it should be? But, oh, it cannot be? Why keep him there? And yet his jealous apprehensions, his shrieks of horror! But it cannot be. No, Isidore—no! When he had gone so deep in guilt as to murder the father and mother, he would not stop at the child, much less would he keep him as a continual memento of his guilt. No—no, it cannot be—it cannot be!'

"Yet," said Don Isidore, 'suppose we go? It can do no injury, and will at least give us a more perfect idea of the situation of the castle to serve us on a future occasion.'

"I agree!" replied the baron. 'Let us go.'

"As soon as they had dined they departed for the castle.

"As they approached it they saw, or thought they saw, the country become more gloomy, and their imagination, influenced by their opinion of the marquess, viewed it as a place cut off from the goods of Providence, where grass grew not, and where the affrighted earth drew back into her womb her natural produce as fearful to trust it to the hands of such a monster.

"They rode along the wall and perceived that they were strongly intrenched behind a deep ditch, over which, as they advanced, they found a drawbridge drawn up.

"Passing further on, they observed that the wall turned to the south ward, and, continuing their route along it, saw that it joined that of the priory.

"They turned back again, and, as they approached the drawbridge, observed three men walking on the wall.

"On their nearer approach, Don Isidore, courteously saluting them, inquired to whom that noble castle belonged.

"One of them returned the salute, and informed him that it belonged to the Marquess de Punalada, that the marquess was from home, and said that he was sorry the arrangements of the castle forbade him from inviting them during the marquess's absence.

"Our travellers had not the smallest doubt, from the youthful voice and manner of the speaker, but that he was the young person of whom such honourable mention had been made by the innkeeper.

"Don Isidore, therefore, accosted him:

"Young gentleman," said he, 'though I should be sorry to break in upon the arrangements, or trespass on the privileges of the castle, I cannot help entreating that you would have the goodness to direct us in the road to Cordova, from which I know not how we have insensibly diverged, and as the roads about here are rather intricately crossed and mixed with each other, you would considerably augment the favour by descending and instructing us particularly how we may avoid going again astray. We are travellers, and, like all travellers who hope to profit by their toil, wish to get the best account possible of the country which we pass through, and here have been unable to find any but uncouth and ignorant peasants incapable of instructing us.'

"You honour me too much," returned the youth, 'by your invitation; but there are reasons why I cannot avail myself of it.'

"Just as he said this, one of the men who was along with him spoke to him in a whisper.

"The three consulted together, and, then, making a sign to Don Isidore to wait, they descended, and letting down the drawbridge, passed over.

"The young man stepped forward and joined Don Isidore and the baron.

"As he approached, the whole company riveted their eyes upon him, and were much pleased, and indeed surprised at the dignity of his mien, the firmness of his deportment, the vigour of his limbs, and the noble, manly expression of his countenance, in which strong character was strongly marked.

"The baron felt a lively emotion of tenderness towards him.

"Don Isidore not less, while Father Thomas had all those sensations which a good heart meliorated by Christianity may be supposed to feel for virtue groaning under oppression.

"They dismounted from their horses, and, leaving them to the care of the servants, walked aside with him.

"He began to speak.

"But an unaccountable sensation broke his utterance, and alternately overspread his face with a shifting red and white.

"However, he informed them that this was the castle of Punalada, as he had said before, and that it was surrounded with walls a considerable length backwards, even to the ground of the convent of Vallesanto. That the marquess was a man of immense estates and great wealth, highly favoured by the Court, but yet so fond of retirement, that he chose rather to live here for many years past than go into the world and assume that figure in it which his rank and fortune entitled him to.

"You are his son, then, I presume?" said Don Isidore.

"No sir; I am indeed the creature of his adoption, preserved by his charity, and now supported by his bounty; but whose son I am, alas! I know not, nor perhaps shall never know. At present, the marquess, by his adoption, is entitled to all those duties which I should pay to my natural parents—perhaps no more."

"Then you are happy?" said the baron.

"The youth hesitated.

"At length he said:

"If I answer in the negative, let me be acquitted of any intentional ingratitude to my protector. I have never gone so far before, and I confess I am astonished to think by what irresistible power your notice of me exacts a confession which I have never made to anyone. The marquess has been kind to me—I owe him everything, yet am not happy."

"Why?" said the baron, earnestly.

"I wish," replied the youth, "to serve my King and be a soldier; but I am not permitted. The marquess (for what reason I cannot tell) is averse to it; it is his will I should not go, and I must submit. Apprehending, as I suppose, that I have formed a design to depart for that purpose without permission, he has ordered me to keep within the walls of the castle, and assigned me a guard; but he need not. I think obedience to his will a duty, and no earthly power shall make me guilty of a breach of it!"

"Nothing could equal their astonishment at the noble sentiments and ingenuous spirit of so young a man.

"The baron gazed upon him as if his eyes had lost their wonted motion.

"Don Isidore took him by the hand, pressed it, and said:

"Unhappy parents, whoever they are, to have lost such a son, and happy he who has acquired such a one even by adoption."

"The marquess," interrupted the baron, "must be sensible of the treasure he possesses. He is fond of you, is he not?"

"Alas! venerable sir," replied the youth, "he, on the contrary, seems to abhor me, and—why, I know not—to consider me as a person unworthy of trust or confidence—as a villain—as a traitor!"

"Here his colour shifted to a deadly pale, and a tear gushed in spite of him from his eyes, while every muscle of his face seemed agitated.

"In short, sirs," continued he, "to be plain, the marquess has of late so treated me that every tie of affection is broken, and the only ligament which now remains to bind me to him, is gratitude—a bond which no true Christian can break. I trust that God will grant me the grace never to violate it. Thus have I, seniors, seduced by an unaccountable feeling which draws me to you with resistless force, deviated from my accustomed maxims of silence. To have at once reposed in you the secret of my heart, appears now strange to myself, yet does it not give me one painful sensation; on the contrary, I feel more tranquil at heart than I have for a long time been."

"Fear not, excellent young man," said Don Isidore. "You speak to men of honour—nay, more, you speak to those who feel their hearts entwined with yours in the reciprocal folds of affection equally strong as yours—equally unaccountable to themselves."

"Let us," said the baron, "call you child. If affection entitles you to that appellation, we claim a stronger right than the marquess."

"And at all events," said Don Isidore, "remember that if the caprice of the marquess, his death, or any other circumstance should leave you at liberty to make a choice, Don Isidore de Haro will be ready to take upon him the office of the father and the friend."

"Don Isidore, you would engross all to yourself," said the baron. "You must allow the claims of the childless to be paramount to yours, and such is mine. My child—for I will call you so," said he, "I am old, and can instruct you, therefore hear me attentively. Hope not that time, reason, or moral, or religious sentiment can work any change in the marquess's heart in thy favour. To use the helpless orphan of his protection with inhumanity, and put bonds upon his mind and person, shows him to possess a soul either naturally depressed, or labouring under some malignant suspicion or hidden animosity, which broods in his heart, but dares not appear and trust one youth. Man in intercourse with man seldom rests at the first stage of good or evil; but when he confers an unmerited benefit, or offers an unprovoked injury, carries the folly of the one act or the wickedness of the other to extremes. Never did I know a man that did not delight in fostering the worst brier he had planted—never do I remember a man who could forgive the innocent he had injured. Let this be your caution—this the guide of your conscience. That gratitude which has outlived affection is a mere religious duty, and, like that of forgiveness of our enemies, extends not to self-injury, involves no positive esteem, enjoins no positive attachment, but merely bids that we pray for, and wish rather good than evil to its object. In this am I right, father?" turning to the priest.

"Perfectly," replied Father Thomas.

"One word more," said the baron, taking him by the hand. "Fly this castle, as you value life, or wish for the protection of Heaven. Guilt saps its walls, vengeance holds its sword over it, and the thunder of Heaven, ere many days be past, will shake it to its foundation! Fly, therefore—quickly fly, and when once thy resolution shall be taken, let this be thy guide."

"With these words, the baron gave him a scrip of paper.

"The youth looked with astonishment at the baron as he spoke.

"He was overawed by the dignity of his looks, while the words he spoke sunk to the inmost recesses of his soul.

"Don Isidore," continued the baron, "we must have this youth between us, for, as of Alphonso, so of him—neither of us will give up his share. And you," said he, "my children," taking both their hands, and putting them into each other, "remember that after this day, if ever you should happen to meet, you meet as brothers."

"With joy," said Alphonso, "I accept from your hands that which was before denied to me—a brother."

"And I," said Fernando, "with gratitude for the acquisition, earnestly hope that I may be worthy of it."

"At this instant one of the servants called out:

"Don Fernando, it is time to return. You know what would be the consequences if we were detected here."

"I shall return directly," said Fernando.

"Then, turning to the baron and Don Isidore, he continued:

"Your advice, seniors, is engraven on my heart; and, if I should fail in persuading the marquess to let me forth, depend upon it I shall take a proper opportunity to claim your protection. In the meantime, may Heaven protect you, and grant you all the happiness you deserve! Reverend father," said he, turning to the priest, "your blessing."

"God bless you, my son!" said the priest.

"And now, my brother—since you allow me to call you so," said he, to Alphonso, "let us embrace and depart."

"He then turned from them, called his attendants, and, tripping over the drawbridge, hauled it up, waved his hand as a last adieu, and disappeared.

"Our travellers had not gone far from the castle, when Pierot, touching Alphonso on the arm, and making him one of his significant becks to drop behind, said, in a low voice, his eyes staring, his mouth round as a circle, and his brows lifted up in astonishment:

"Answer me two questions which I shall put to you. Is this country all enchanted, or is it not? And who, tell me—who do you think that young cavalier is like? Let me see whether we be all bewitched, or whether it is me alone that the devil plays his pranks with."

"And is this," said Alphonso, "the cause of your important becken to me to fall behind with you? To what end lead those two ridiculous questions?"

"I'll tell you what, sener—if you were to hang or burn me I cannot but think that I am bewitched, for when that youth appeared, and I first saw him, I wiped my eyes again and again, and I doubted whether I was awake; but to the very last I was bewitched, for, if I was not, how could he appear to me to be my master, Don Isidore?"

"Why, Pierot," said Alphonso, looking earnestly in his face, 'are you out of your senses? What strange notion is now running in your precious noddle?"

"May I live," replied Pierot, 'if that young cavalier did not seem to me to be the very same man that carried away my lady, your mother, from her father's, near Talavera, that married her, and that is now there riding before us. Nay, your honour need not stare, for to be sure, it is all bewitchment and sorcery, for there is nothing about us here but conjurers, magicians, spirits and witches, and I wish we were well out of it.'

"Alphonso, seriously alarmed, spurred his horse and rode up to the others, and, in terms of affection and tenderness, deplored the insanity of Pierot, and told them the whole of what had passed, and besought them to examine him.

"Did I not tell you," said the baron to Don Isidore, 'never did I see so strong a resemblance—that of this youth to Gonzalvo is not greater than that of Fernando to you. It is a strange, mysterious business! Would that we could get to the bottom of it!'

CHAPTER DXCI.

CONTINUATION OF THE STORY.

"As soon as they arrived at the city of Burgos, the baron, Don Isidore, Father Thomas and their attendants remained at their inn, while Alphonso went to Court.

"He first made it his business to see his patron, Don Juan de Padilla, and besought him to obtain for him a private audience of the King, to whom he said he should, in his preference, unfold a business no less surprising than horrible.

"The King, not less inclined to oblige his minister than to serve his favourite, instantly granted him the audience in presence of Don Juan.

"Alphonso began by entreating his Majesty to believe that nothing less than a business of a most serious moment could induce him to call upon his Majesty's attention in so very serious and urgent a manner.

"He plighted himself to prove, to the conviction of the world, one of the most execrable conspiracies that ever was conceived by man in his most abandoned wickedness—a conspiracy formed against the honour, the fortunes, and the lives of a house distinguished in the service of the crown of Castile, carried into effect, concealed for many years, and at length discovered by means more than ordinary, by the intervention of the avenging hand of Heaven.

"He said that the affair was so intricate, so dependent on a variety of proofs, and so very difficult of explanation, that it would be necessary, as well for his Majesty's ease as for the more perfect elucidation of it, to have the principal personages of it before his Majesty; and he earnestly entreated to have the liberty of bringing them on the morrow in attendance before him.

"One of them was Don Isidore, his father; another, the Reverend Father Thomas Augustino; and the third, Baron de Rayo.

"How?" said Don Juan. 'Baron de Rayo! Is he not dead? and have not his estates been confiscated, and his titles extinct?"

"That the baron's estates were confiscated, and his blood attainted by Peter," said Alphonso, 'is too true; but it is equally true that he lives, and that the attainer was taken off by our late King Henry. The conspiracy and consequent frauds and murder that led to that—'

"How? Murder!" exclaimed the King.

"Even so, my liege. Murder most foul, perhaps worse," returned Alphonso. 'I say, and I undertake—at the hazard of my life, and, what I value more, your Majesty's favour—to prove, that the house of Rayo has sunk beneath the hands of a villain and murderer!'

"This is strong language," said the King.

"It is, my liege," said Don Juan; 'and such, as I presume, Alphonso, ere he uttered it, was prepared to make good.

"Then what is the scope of your present demand?" said the King.

"That the persons I have named be permitted, on the morrow, to come before your Majesty, in presence of Don Juan and such other persons as your Majesty may think fit, there to lay before you the whole of this transaction.'

"I grant it," said the King.

"May your faithful servant," said Alphonso, 'presume to suggest the necessity of secrecy, for the present. Don Rodrigo is nearly concerned in the event, though not in the guilt.'

"Enough," said the King. 'To-morrow morning, at ten o'clock, I will, for greater caution, be at Don Juan's house. There we will hear of this extraordinary affair.'

"In the morning, Alphonso, attended by Don Isidore, the baron, and Father Thomas, repaired to Don Juan's house.

"He received them all with every mark of esteem, and particularly treated the baron with distinguished respect.

"They discoursed upon the business in hand, and Don Juan assured them of the King's resolution to render justice to the baron.

"At the appointed time, the King came, and with him the Corregidor of Burgos.

"The King desired Alphonso to proceed.

"Alphonso entreated that the Baron de Rayo might be permitted to explain the nature of the case.

"The baron began from the commencement, and after deprecating the imputation of egotism if he spoke of himself, which the nature of the case demanded, gave an account of the services of himself and family to the State.

"He then described the heroism and achievements of his son, and drew a picture of the sufferings of him and his daughter, which affected the King extremely.

"He then adverted to his own miseries, his imprisonment, wanderings, want, and, finally, his reception by Don Isidore.

"Here Alphonso took up the affair with an account of the incidents at Vallesanto.

"Don Isidore then began with the story of the search.

"And, lastly, Father Thomas produced the ring, sabre, crucifix, and dagger, and the papers found in the portmanteau sealed up, all of which they jointly and severally swore to.

"Don Juan was astonished.

"He said that the leading circumstances of the tale tallied exactly with facts in his recollection.

"He was intimate with Gonzalvo, knew his device, believed the ring was his, and would certainly know his armour, as they had often fought together; and he particularly recollected that the Marquess de Punalada suddenly retired from Court soon after the disappearance of Gonzalvo.

"From the letters, which were almost fallen to pieces, were collected the following sentences:—

"LETTER I.

"You have not an hour to lose, Gonzalvo—Padre Pablo will tell you all—Haste you away; a moment's delay may put your wife, beyond your power, in the embraces of the King."

"LETTER II.

(Opened the second, but probably the first in point of date.)

"There is a convent, with the prior of which I have some power—Two of my domestics will attend you there—No other place affords you a sanctuary against the disappointed—"

"LETTER III.

"Leave it to me to develop the affair to the baron—All your property, papers, &c., I will secure for you—Depend on the continuance of my good offices."

"Here the corregidor demanded whether there was any mark or signature by which to ascertain who had been the writer of those letters.

"My lord," said the baron, 'his Majesty and you will observe that, in this strange discovery, evidently made under the directing hand of Heaven, presumptive evidence is the utmost we can yet reach. The identity of the person murdered will be admitted sufficiently proved when the ring, the armour and the letters directed to

Gonzalvo, found with the skeleton—the skull of which is split transversely, and the instrument lying in the place—are taken into consideration. The question, then, is, whether this proof be not sufficient to induce your Majesty to set on foot an inquiry, to call the father-prior of the convent to account for that crowd of suspicious circumstances, and thence to draw more ample proof of the guilt of the accused?”

“This,” said the King, “is certainly reasonable.”

“The corregidor agreed with his Majesty.”

“Your Majesty, then, sees,” continued the baron, “that the next consideration will be how to do this in such a manner as to prevent the cunning of those concerned from rendering the inquiry abortive; and as I have turned the whole through my mind, and have considered it with so much the more attention as I am most concerned in the issue, I will, with your Majesty’s permission, suggest a plan which, I trust, will meet with your approbation.”

“The corregidor desired him to explain himself.”

“My scheme,” said the baron, “is this. In the first place, let some of your lordship’s most intelligent officers, duly authorised, proceed with us to the vaults, and there take full cognizance, and testify to your lordship in writing what shall appear to them. Let this, along with the testimony of the reverend Father here, of Don Isidore, and of Don Alphonso be made up into a record, and deposited, together with the ring, armour, sabre, and letters, in the archives of your Court. On this your Majesty will ground an order for the arrest of all parties suspected; and, in the execution of this, care must be taken to prevent any impediments, by collusion or otherwise, being thrown in the way of justice. To this end, while one armed force surrounds the castle of Punalada on one side, and another the priory on the other, we, with a chosen few of your Majesty’s appointment, will enter the vault by the passage, and be ready to receive anyone that might enter it through the castle. I have many reasons for expecting, from the execution of this plan, much success, seeing that the sudden concussion of unexpected fear has often shaken from the soul of a hardened sinner a guilty secret, which the deliberate operations of justice, nay torture itself, could not wring from him.”

“The corregidor then declared that, notwithstanding the miraculous tenor of the whole transaction, everything which had fallen from the baron carried so much the sterling weight of truth, as, joined with the evidence, and his and the other witnesses’ known integrity, served to bear down all doubt of his sincerity, and he entirely approved of his plan for facilitating a full discovery and ensuring justice. And, in conclusion, he added, that he would appoint a proper person to go and hold the inquest desired.”

“The King, on his part, assured the baron that, on the proof of what he had advanced being established—(of which, by-the-bye, he had little doubt)—every practicable reparation should be made to him and his family.”

“For,” said he, “exclusive of the demand of justice, I shall think something especially due to the friend of Alphonso.”

Alphonso, penetrated with gratitude, knelt and kissed the King’s hand.

“The King and corregidor retired.”

“Don Juan kept them all that day at his house.”

“In the evening an officer arrived with a letter from the corregidor to the baron.”

“He had orders to proceed directly on the inquest.”

“They resolved to set out that night.”

“It was agreed, however, that the servants should remain behind to prevent unnecessary speculation.”

CHAPTER DXCII.

CONTINUATION OF THE STORY.

“It was just twilight when they arrived in the valley.”

“They proceeded to the bower, where, according to a prior determination, the baron and Don Isidore remained with the horses, while Father Thomas, the officer, and Alphonso went to the chapel.”

“Arrived at the mouth of the subterranean passage, they struck a light, and found the place just as it had been left by them.”

“The obstructions being now few, they got down without much loss of time.”

“Alphonso soon found the little door that opened into the vault.”

“The officer entered, crossing himself, and was smote with horror at the spectacle presented to his view.”

“He examined the skull, the armour, everything, and took down an accurate account of the whole in writing.”

“In order to establish the point of the relative situation with the convent, Father Thomas opened the cemetery and showed him the bodies of the deceased fathers of the convent, which he likewise exactly noted, and then again returned into the vault.”

“Alphonso then took out the key and opened the door at which the baron had before stopped at the suggestion of the priest.”

“They now entered a long, vaulted gallery, which branched off transversely on either side the door.”

“Here they stopped to deliberate which way they should turn—whether to the right branch or the left.”

“While they were in this state of suspense, their ears were struck with the notes of soft music, which seemed to come from the extreme end of the right branch of the vaulted gallery.”

“They paused.”

“The music died away.”

“They then, with as little noise as possible, went forward.”

“Again the music struck up, and they could distinctly hear a female voice, as sweet as that of a seraph’s, accompanied by a guitar.”

“They stood and listened attentively.”

“But they could hear no distinct words.”

“At the conclusion of a stanza it ceased, and a sigh, that would have rent the knotty heart of apathy itself and extorted pity from the remorseless savage of the woods, followed it.”

“They again, as cautiously as possible, stepped forward, and at the end of the gallery found that it again branched off to the left.”

“At this instant they heard another sigh, and presently a voice, tuned by the hand of harmony itself, exclaimed:

“‘Oh, blessed and most merciful Redeemer, when shall my soul take its flight and shelter itself in thy bosom from the miseries of this life?’”

“He took advantage of the speaking to step forward without giving alarm, and perceived before them a glimmering light faintly break across the gallery.”

Alphonso, who carried the lamp, laid it down at the turning.

“They came to a door, across which near the top was cut a hole of about a foot long, and four or five inches broad, grated with small bars of iron.”

“Father Thomas stepped forward, cautiously peeped in, and beckoned to the others to do the same.”

“They beheld in a low, gloomy chamber a lady on her knees before a couch praying, with eyes and hands devoutly uplifted to Heaven.”

“Her face, which they could distinctly see, bore every mark of dignity and beauty, but faded and strongly impressed with the vestiges of care, thought, and affliction.”

“Her lips ceased to move.”

“The tears gushed in torrents from her eyes.”

“She dropped her arms upon the couch.”

“Then sank down with her face between her hands, uttered a heartrending sigh, and remained motionless.”

“Alphonso’s heart beat so strongly as to agitate his whole frame, and he breathed short and hard.”

“Father Thomas feared he might be heard, and drew him away.”

“The officer continued to observe what passed within.”

“Presently a door opened in the extreme end of the room, and he observed a large man, seemingly of above the middle time of life, enter.”

“He had a lamp in one hand, and a sword in the other.”

“The lady started, and, seeing him, arose, and sat down on the couch.”

“He joined her, and seating himself, with an air of familiarity, by her side, addressed her with:

“‘Always in tears! What! shall I be ever patient, only to excite fresh insult? Shall I find you still incorrigible? And does not the apprehension of my power yet subdue your stubborn soul?’”

“‘Alas! my lord,’ returned the lady, ‘is a lapse of so many, many years in this dreary cell under all the miseries

of anxiety and incertitude—is the resolute endurance of violence, insult, and opprobrious abuse—is the firmness with which I resisted the active endeavours of your hireling priest, who betrayed his God, and used the sacred privilege of confession to pour pernicious poison in mine ear, and act the pander's part—is the fortitude with which I resigned my infant to that death with which you menaced him, rather than wrong my most beloved lord—are my vows, solemnly made and registered in Heaven—are the mortifying scorn with which I have always treated your protestations, and my contempt and hatred of your hideous person—are those fervent petitions, which now, for many years, I have, every hour of the undistinguished day and night, wafted to Heaven, with the sighs of an afflicted heart, to smite your guilty head, and level it with the dust—are all these, I say, openly expressed, and every day avowed, yet insufficient to convict the presumption of your heart, or convince you of the folly, as well as wickedness, of your hopes? Begone! Or, if nothing will convince your senseless vanity, nor quell the fiend that works within you, but assurance sealed with blood, take my life! But, oh, that would be mercy—an act above the reach of your gloomy soul! Nay, strain all your cruelty to the utmost—let all the petty vengeance of a base soul be let loose upon me; but cease to torture me with repetitions of your foul, polluted vows, nor insult the ashes of my murdered husband, whose arm, when living, could have crushed you into dust!

"'Once for all, then, hear me, madam,' said the man. 'Here I solemnly swear—'

"'How shalt thou swear? By what? Unhappy man, who hast already broken every tie that binds man to man, every bond that connects the creature with its creator, who hast so far outstripped all precedent of sin as to leave your crimes without a name, and run beyond the pale even of Heaven's mercy.'

"'If there,' interrupted he—'if there be yet left in Heaven's mercy one ray of hope to gleam upon my soul, may it be cut off and consign me to utter darkness if I do not now once for all speak the irrevocable purpose of my mind—my firm, unalterable resolve. Your son, as I have already told you, convicted of treacherous designs against my castle and my life, now awaits his doom in chains!'

"'What, was his talking with a few armed men treachery?'

"'Nay,' interrupted the man, 'but he mentioned a name which this—'

"'What name?' exclaimed the lady.

"'Hear me, proud woman!' interrupted the man, hastily—'hear me, nor disturb me with your raving. By that oath which I've just sworn, he dies! One thing only, and that you know, can save him.'

"'Then let him die!'

"'By Heavens, he shall die before you!'

"'And thinkest thou, monster, that, after yielding up the life of my child, I can stoop to tremble at the manner of his death? No, let it be!'

"'One week,' said he, rising, 'I allow you for deliberation; at the end of that time, shouldst thou remain stubborn, though my own death should go hand in hand with it, and eternal perdition wait on death, it shall be done!'

"Then moving to the door, and casting at her a look full of horror and fury, he said, sternly:

"'Think upon it,' and withdrew.

"'For one week, then,' said the lady, 'I shall not be afflicted with sight of you.'

"'Remember,' said he, returning, 'a week—by Heaven, but a week!' and again retired.

"The lady then threw herself down upon the couch, wept bitterly, and remained immovable.

"The priest then withdrew, and brought away the others, saying it was probable that nature, exhausted, was sinking into sleep.

"'And who may those people be?' said the officer.

"'Hush!' said the priest—'let us begone.'

"They returned into the vault, and shut the door after them.

"'Be particular,' said the priest to the officer, 'in noting the conversation you have just heard.'

"'I shall,' said the officer. 'This armour we must bear away—it is the corregidor's orders. The rest I can well report.'

"'Everything passed with the secrecy they wished.

"They found the baron and Don Isidore with the horses, and, mounting, were out of the valley by day-break.

"As they went along, Father Thomas, in whose mind the expiration of the week appeared with all its horrors, pressed them to hasten forward, telling them, in general terms, that if they were not back in a week, dreadful consequences might ensue; and as it was full four days' journey to Burgos at the common rate of travelling, it was found expedient to put their horses to the push.

"The baron could not comprehend what Father Thomas meant, nor would the latter tell him, but amused him with a story of his own fiction.

"The truth was, Father Thomas, knowing the warm, impetuous temper of the baron, was afraid to tell him what passed in the vault, lest it should rouse him to some act of rashness that might defeat all their projects; and had enjoined Alphonso and the officer to be silent on that head.

"They arrived at Burgos on the evening of the third day.

"The urgency of the case being a sufficient excuse, the officer that night made a faithful report to the corregidor, and Don Juan, hearing the whole, went to the King.

"They viewed the armour, and Don Juan, having it cleansed in the proper places, said he would bear witness to its being Gonzalvo's.

"The priest then gave an exact account of the scene in the lady's chamber.

"The King was horrorstruck.

"'Never,' said he, 'have I heard of such an accumulated guilt.'

"The baron was much agitated.

"At last, with much difficulty, he said:

"'It must be she; it is—it is my daughter, and that youth to whom we spoke at the castle is her son.'

"Then, turning to the King and bending his aged knee, he said:

"'A boon, my liege—I ask a boon.'

"'I grant it,' said the King.

"'My boon, then,' said the baron, rising, 'is, that this very night measures may be taken to secure the prior and heads of the convent of Vallesanto and the Marquess de Pinalada, with his domestics.'

"'I will not only do so,' said the King, 'but will even take it as a favour if Don Juan will go along with you.'

"Don Juan cheerfully assented, and received orders to direct three troops of horse to hold themselves instantly in readiness to march.

"'In the meantime,' said the King, 'I shall send for the Archbishop of Toledo to attend me, in order to get his warrant, without which, I should not wish to touch the convent.'

"The next morning all marched properly instructed and authorised.

"The baron and his party went out of the city by a different route from Don Juan and the troops.

"On the evening of the fourth day they reached the valley, and according to the plan settled between them, the baron and Don Isidore and two troops went round by the Villaverde road to the castle, while one led by Don Juan and attended by father Thomas and Alphonso, went towards the convent, where, after giving proper instructions to the commanding officer, they left them and proceeded to the chapel, removed the usual impediments, and found their way into the vault.

"Here having viewed everything, Alphonso drew forth the key, opened the door, entered the transverse passage, and proceeded gently towards the door that looked into the lady's chamber.

"They perceived her lying asleep upon a couch, and a lamp burning on a table by her side.

"Here they impatiently waited the sound of the trumpet from the castle gate, each straining his eyes to get a view of the lady's face, yet daring not to make a noise.

"At length the wished-for signal was given.

"The trumpet sounded.

"An universal clamour and noise were heard at a distance.

"The lady still slept.

"A clanking of chains was distinguished approaching the chamber on the far side, and the door flying open, the man seen before appeared dragging along the ground by the hair with one hand the unfortunate Fernando, who,



[JONATHAN WILD SHOTS THE GAMEKEEPER.]

being shackled, could not stand; and in the other, brandishing a sabre, while fury, wildness and terror rendered his countenance horrible beyond expression.

"Here, madam," said he, dragging the youth to the foot of the couch, "the hour is come, and your son is brought to die at your feet!"

"The lady suddenly started from her sleep, screamed, threw herself upon her son, and swooned.

"You have now," said he to Fernando, "brought treason to my doors, and 'tis fit that you should die. To make vengeance more complete, I will wait till your mother revives to behold it!"

"Alphonso could no longer restrain himself, but, rushing against the door, splintered it to pieces.

"Villain!" he cried, "hold your murderous hand, or you die this instant!"

"The marquess started at the word.

"He looked up.

"At the sight of Alphonso, the sword fell from his hand.

No. 123.—BLUESKIN.

"His hair stood erect.

"His knees knocked against each other.

"His face assumed the very image of death.

"He was bereft of speech with the agony of his fear, and his eyes glared without any appearance of motion.

"At length, he threw himself prostrate on his face and swooned.

"In the meanwhile, the lady, assisted by Don Juan, came to herself.

"She stared wildly about her.

"Is he dead?" she said. "Oh, no! Is not this he? Alas! I have not seen my child these many years!"

"She then looked down eagerly on her son, who, on his part, seeing his friend Alphonso, exclaimed, in ecstasy:

"Gracious Heaven! is this Alphonso? Surely it is? Ah, where, Alphonso—where is the Baron de Rayo?"

"Ha! What saidst thou, my child? Did you say the Baron de Rayo? It cannot be! Ah, no; my father is long since numbered with the dead, else I should not be here, nor you!"

"While this was passing in the subterranean part of the castle, the officer had summoned, in the King's name, the lord of the castle to open the gates.

"The marquess, who had, in his consternation at the first account of their arrival, proceeded to the act of desperation already mentioned, was sought for in vain over the castle.

"The prior, perceiving the convent gate besieged by a troop, immediately betook himself to his wonted passage, to seek the marquess.

"His route lay through the left branch of the vaulted gallery already mentioned, and thence along by the door of the lady's chamber.

"Hearing a noise of words, he thought the marquess was there, and in his precipitation, burst into the chamber, just as the lady had ended her last sentence.

"Nothing could exceed his astonishment.

"He started back, but she saw him and cried:

"Ha! officious pander, art thou come to help thy lord and master and fill up the measure of thy iniquities by new butcheries?"

"Father," said Don Juan, stepping up to him, "I arrest you in the name of the King!"

"Then, turning to Alphonso, and pointing to the marquess, who still lay prostrate, he continued:

"Lift up that recreant lord, and let us bring them both from this place towards the castle, which, it should seem, lies this way."

"They then lifted up the marquess, who, opening his eyes, stared at Alphonso and exclaimed:

"It is—it is the murdered Gonzalvo!"

"They hurried him and the prior suddenly through the door by which his lordship had entered; while the lady, who had all along kept her eyes fixed on her son Fernando, at the name of Gonzalvo cast up her eyes and caught a side glimpse of Alphonso just as he pushed the marquess through the door.

"She screamed—started from the body of her son, and calling out 'My husband—my husband!' flew towards Alphonso, while he and Don Juan were beyond measure shocked and astonished.

"Don Juan, apprehending her to be delirious, laid hold of her, and, with some reluctance on her part, brought her back to the couch.

"She screamed and struggled violently.

"Oh, villain—villain! Are you, too, a murderer? And will you keep me from my long-lost lord, whom I thought dead?"

"She then paused, and, turning to him, said:

"Is he indeed alive, or has my sight been blessed with the shade of my husband?"

"For Heaven's sake, dear lady," said Don Juan, "compose yourself, and prepare your mind for news that will delight you; for though your husband be not alive, your deliverance from the tyrant is at hand, and all will yet be well."

"Just at these words, they heard a great noise.

"I must go," said Don Juan—"my presence may be necessary."

"Good Heavens!" said the lady, looking earnestly at him. "Is not this—Alas! my recollection is gone, and time and grief have effaced names from my memory. Were you not a friend of Gonzalvo's?"

"I was."

"Your name?"

"Don Juan de Padilla."

"The same," said she. "Does my father live?" she asked, eagerly.

"He does," replied Don Juan. "I must away, and will bring him to you soon."

"Don Juan at length found his way, directed by the noise, through a long, dark, vaulted gallery, which led him to a small closet, whence, following the sound, he passed through several chambers, till at last he came to a large hall, where he found the marquess and the prior surrounded by a crowd of soldiers and domestics, to whom the baron was explaining the nature of the affair, and the manner of the discovery of the marquess's villany.

"The marquess sat crestfallen, with his head dropped upon his breast, and the prior endeavoured to expostulate with the baron, and throw the whole odium of the business upon the marquess.

"The entrance of Don Juan put an end to the whole cabal.

"He ordered the marquess and prior to be confined in separate places, to prevent any collusive arrangement with regard to their confession.

"Fear not," said the prior. "I will confess all. Here I shake off all that false levity which has hitherto restrained me from discovering this bad man's guilt. Everything that I know, from the beginning to this minute—even the little share that I have had by winking so long at it—shall be candidly and without reserve laid before you."

"Here the marquess started like one suddenly roused from sleep.

"To the King's mandate," said he, addressing Don Juan, "I bow with due submission, and shall attend you, sir, whithersoever you shall be ordered to lead me. But let not the calm artifice—the monkish subtlety of that wretch heap more guilt upon me than is properly my own. What share he has had in my misfortunes, you shall all soon know. Then will you see what mischiefs may lurk beneath the monkish cowl. Heaven, incensed, demands expiation of a foul offence, and shall have it, if the most unequivocal avowal and ample confession, rendering to the last letter of the truth justice to him and to myself, can lead to it. To this end, I will draw up, and afterwards sign in presence of you all, a full confession of this dark affair. Let me have but two hours to myself, for the purpose, undisturbed in my closet."

"After consulting together, it was agreed that he should be allowed the time required, but not in his closet.

"Pens, ink, and paper were therefore allowed him in a room in a distant wing of the castle where he could get at no papers or evidences to destroy them, while guards were stationed beneath the windows and at the door.

"Meantime, they entered his closet, where they looked up and scaled all his papers.

"They then proceeded to the vault, where the young Fernando was released, and the baron once more pressed to his bosom his long-lost daughter.

"When the indescribable emotions of paternal and filial reverence had a little subsided into calmness, they led her forth into the upper part of the castle, where, the unaccustomed air and light overcoming her, she swooned.

"The baron, Don Juan, and the rest continued their search, and were astonished at the number of vaults and subterraneous passages which lay in all directions round the foundations of the castle and convent.

"They concluded by closing up the vault where the bones of Gonzalvo lay, till arrangements should be made for a proper interment.

"Three hours had been thus spent, when they returned to the hall, and, finding that the marquess had not yet come forth, proceeded to the room where he was.

"They knocked at the door, and, receiving no answer, opened it, and found the unhappy man covered with blood and in the agonies of death.

"They raised him up, and he expired.

"He had cut the great artery of the neck entirely across, and so had rendered assistance, had it been at hand at the minute, ineffectual.

"A paper, fresh written and signed by him, lay on the table.

"Don Juan took it up and delivered it to Father Thomas, who read it aloud in the following words:—

CHAPTER DXCIII.

CONTINUATION OF THE STORY.

"THIS castle was once a nunnery, and is coeval with the convent of Vallesanto; this will account for the number of subterraneous passages which unite them.

"In an invasion of the Moors they took possession of it and dispersed the nuns.

"One of my ancestors drove them hence and got the estate from the King as the reward of his valour, hence the convent became in some sort under the dominion of the lord of this castle, who, by various entrenchments on the rights of the church, got at last the sole appointment of prior to the convent.

"The monster who is now prior was bred, by my father's charity, about this castle, a mendicant child. He was the companion of my youth, the depository of my secrets, the confidant and agent of my amours, and when,

by my father's desire, he took the habit, he became my confessor.

"On my coming to the estate, I kept him in my family, intending to give him the priory on the death of the then incumbent.

"Meantime I married, and found in the marchioness a most tender and affectionate companion and a gentle corrector of my vices.

"I was happy; but the enemy of mankind envied me my bliss, and in the shape of that friar, plunged me into eternal, endless perdition.

"Gonzalvo brought his wife to Toledo. I saw her, and was smitten with her beauty, yet for a time I had virtue enough to resist the flame.

"I confessed it to Father Pedro. He used his endeavours to mitigate it by letting in at first a ray of sinful hope.

"Here I first stumbled, and never recovered myself till I fell into the abyss of guilt in which you see me.

"With the subtle casuistry of a church logician, he refined away the criminality of adulterous indulgence by opposing it to the sin of suicide, for so he denominated my forbearing, at the risk of my life and health, which were obviously declining.

"He laid a plan—even now, after an interval of twenty years spent in buffeting the assaults of conscience, my blood runs cold to think of it. He not only devised the diabolical plan, but he aided in the execution of it. The marchioness was in the way—she fell sick—the reverend father found her a physician—and she died. The prior of this convent fell sick and died also.

"Hitherto all fell out, or rather was conducted, to the accomplishment of the chief plot. Gonzalvo was made to believe that the King looked with an eye of lust upon his wife. I was his close counsellor and friend, and persuaded him to carry her away with the utmost secrecy, and deposit her in a nunnery which I told him was here.

"The father was their guide. I hastened to the castle while he conducted them through the convent into the cemetery, from which, he said, the lady should pass into the nunnery. She was accordingly led into a remote room of this castle, near the passage to the cemetery, while I went forward with two assassins, hired for the purpose by the priest.

"We led Gonzalvo into that vault where his body was found, and, as he stooped to enter (his great height making him stoop more than us, and he consequently being more exposed), one of the assassins smote him with a sabre and split his skull.

"With the priest's help, we took a shell and some boards from the cemetery, and, putting him in, buried him on the spot.

"When this was done, the priest whispered me privately that our safety demanded the death of the assassins. He did not allow me time to deliberate, but, turning suddenly round, plunged a dagger into the breast of him that was nearest, and then assailing the other, who resisted, I dispatched him with my sword on the instant.

"The virtue of the lady set her above all my efforts. The officious churchman proposed force. I attempted it, but in vain. The feeble efforts of a weak woman were sufficient to beat me from that object for the attainment of which I had waded through a sea of blood.

"By bribing the nurse, I got her child into my hands, and daily threatened him with death if she did not comply. In vain. She resisted—and remains as pure in person as in soul.

"By a feigned tale to the King, I got all the family estates confiscated and put in my possession. If my crimes admit of any mitigation, let it not be forgot that I saved the Baron de Rayo from Peter's fury, who, incensed with the baron's haughtiness, would, but for me, have put him to death. Let this speak in favour of my innocent daughter.

"Fernando's nurse lives. She is in—

"PUNALADA."

"Here the knocking at the door cut off the rest, and left them in doubt about the nurse.

"Don Juan ordered the domestics who were at hand to take away the body of the marquess, then sealed the papers in presence of all, and gave strict orders to keep the prior in custody.

"He then took Fernando—who was so bewildered with the wonders of the day that he scarcely knew whether what passed was reality or a dream—by the hand, and saluted him by the name of Gonzalvo, congratulating him at the same time on the fortunate discovery of his parents and his certain accession to rank and fortune.

"While they were making the proper arrangements for securing everything to abide the King's pleasure, a woman came in and informed them that the lady had recovered from the fit, but was delirious.

"The baron and Fernando immediately proceeded to her chamber.

"Come hither, my father," said she, "and give your daughter a last blessing! And you, my son, come and take mine."

"Why," said the baron—"why a last blessing? This sickness, produced by the shocks and surprises of to-day and the change of air, will soon wear off, and days of happiness yet attend you."

"Never, my father—never! I have seen that which assures me—

"What have you seen, my Maria?"

"As I live, I saw my Henry—my husband—in that hideous vault! I this day saw him!"

"Calm," said the baron—"calm those violent agitations, which proceed from an error—an error which I can explain, and will effectually. He whose figure so deceived you is the son of Don Isidore de Haro, your cousin and Gonzalvo's, but so exactly the counterpart of my son, that I never see him without astonishment. His likeness struck the guilty marquess into a paroxysm of horror that shook reason from its seat, and made him his own accuser."

"Isidore lives, then?" she said.

"He does," replied the baron. "The friend, the support, and the protection of your father's age, and to this son of his we owe, under God, the discovery of this horrid affair. As soon as rest has fitted you for a new surprise, you shall see them both, and hear everything. In the meantime, let this assurance appease the perturbation of your mind, and try and take some rest."

"With this they departed.

"Meanwhile, an account of the marquess's death and the arrest of the prior reached the convent.

"All there was uproar—the guard would let no one pass.

"At length a requisition was sent from the young lady there to be permitted to pass to the castle, and see her father, though dead.

"This was readily granted.

"She flew round, passed through the court-yard, and entered the great hall in a state of distraction, calling aloud on her father.

"She passed by Don Isidore, Don Juan, and everyone who met her, without seeming conscious of their presence.

"At length she met Alphonso.

"At sight of him she stopped short, and stared with a fixed attention.

"Her bosom heaved, her colour shifted from red to white and back again.

"Her limbs trembled, and she was falling, when he caught her in his arms.

"She remained insensible for some time.

"At length recovering, she again regarded him with a steady gaze, and, in a deep, piercing tone, said:

"Then thou art he, and the prediction is accomplished? The house of Punalada is in ruins?"

"Then, breaking from him, she continued:

"Show me where my father is!" and darted from their sight.

"That day Don Juan and Alphonso, with one troop of horse, and the prior their prisoner, set out for Burgos, as well to lay the whole before the King as procure a proper conveyance to remove the lady from the castle.

"The King was horrorstruck and astonished.

"He forthwith called a council, of which the Archbishop of Toledo made part, in which it was determined that the prior should be handed over to the Grand Inquisitor—that the attainder of Gonzalvo should be entirely erased from the records of the Court—that the title of Punalada should be extinguished, and the marquess's whole fortunes confiscated, and that so much of them as had before belonged to the baron and Gonzalvo, together

with one half his original estate, reserving a small annuity for his daughter, should pass over to the baron and his issue, the King reserving the other half to himself to bestow on Alphonso.

"That day proclamation was made of the marquess's death, attainder, and forfeiture, and of the reinvestiture of the baron with his estate, rank, and title.

"They returned to the castle of Punalada, with a carriage of the King's to convey the lady to Court, the King being desirous of offering her every mark of distinction, and a vehicle for the remains of Gonzalvo.

"When they arrived, they found that Don Rodrigo had been there, and, on being refused admission to his uncle's closet, and possession of the castle, had set off in a rage, threatening them all with the indignation of the King.

"The body of the marquess had been consigned to the earth with the ignominy attached to suicide, and the lady was recruited, and not only willing, but desirous to quit the castle.

"When Alphonso was, after proper precaution, introduced to her, her astonishment was greater than ever it was before.

"She knew not what to think, what to say, or how to conduct herself.

"She looked at everyone round her in turn, to read in their faces some solution of a mystery that she could not help thinking was involved in it.

"Her husband—her beloved Gonzalvo stood before her.

"Astonishment drank up her tears—she could not cry, yet she would if she could to ease her heart.

"With much difficulty, at length she faltered out:

"Is this, then, really the son of Don Isidore de Haro?"

"The baron looked grave—Don Isidore more so.

"It is so," said she. "Yet it is strange!"

"It is the will of God," said the baron. "And shall we presume to scan it?"

"No," said she—"no! However irreconcilable it may be to our weak senses, it must be right."

"Here she paused.

"This confusion of resemblance," she said, "Don Isidore, points out that union which should always subsist between our children. Therefore suffer me to treat Alphonso and this our son as equally our children."

"You speak my very soul, madam," said Don Isidore, "for my attachment to your son is not less than yours to mine, and there seems already to subsist between them the affection of brothers."

"The youths were delighted, and all parties were as happy as their different circumstances may be supposed to admit of.

"Preparations were made for their departure.

"The baron got the remains of Gonzalvo, even to the dust in the chest, carefully put into a coffin, and laid in the vehicle.

"Then, after seeing the King's officers take possession and seal down everything, the baron, Father Thomas, and Don Isidore, got with the lady into the carriage, and proceeded towards Burgos, while Alphonso and his friend Fernando rode by their side.

CHAPTER DXCIV.

THE STORY CONCLUDED.

"It was pretty far advanced in the night of the fourth day before they came near the city.

"Alphonso and Fernando, taken up with reflection and mutual congratulations on their happiness, dropped behind, and had fallen into conversation on the beauty of the night and the brightness of the moon, when, just as the carriage turned the corner at the extreme end of an olivary, and got out of hearing, a band of armed ruffians rushed from the covert of the trees upon the two youths, who had no person to aid them in resistance but Pierot.

"Before they were prepared to defend themselves, one of the ruffians from behind buried a dagger in the shoulder of Alphonso, and felled him to the earth.

"Fernando, on the instant, saw the stroke given, and smote the ruffian to the ground.

"He then vigorously attacked the rest, and, Pierot coming up to his aid, beat them all off but three, who lay weltering under the wounds given them by Fernando.

"Pierot then pursued and stopped the coach, relating at the same time what had passed.

"Don Alphonso," he said, "is killed, and we may as well all at once put an end to ourselves!"

"The lady screamed.

"Don Isidore burst from the carriage, and, followed by the baron, ran up to the field of action, and found Fernando weeping over the body of Alphonso.

"Where," said Don Isidore,—"where is my boy? Where is my Alphonso?"

"Let us lift him up," said the baron, "perhaps life may yet be in him."

"Gallop forward," said Father Thomas to Pierot, "and see if there be a house at hand to which we can carry him; and go you and bring a surgeon directly. Perhaps something may yet be done."

"Just at this instant, a mounted patrol of the Ronda came up.

"The baron hailed them.

"Here hath been murder committed," said he. "Have you got a light?"

"Yes," said the officer, and, displaying a dark lantern, dismounted, and examined those on the ground.

"Alphonso was bleeding profusely.

"They lifted him up, tore off his coat, and perceived that the wound had entered his shoulder-blade very deep.

"They did their utmost to stop the effusion of blood; and the captain of the troop, being informed by one of his people that the carriage in waiting belonged to the King, drew forth a leathern bottle with wine, and poured some of it down Alphonso's throat.

"He soon exhibited some slight tokens of life, and his pulse moved.

"They brought him to the carriage, where they found Donna Maria inconsolable, and, by the direction of the officer, moved forward to an inn not far distant; while he and his men took charge of the wounded ruffians, and brought them after.

"Alphonso was laid on a bed at the inn, with little symptom of life.

"A surgeon soon attended, and declared that it was impossible he could recover.

"Donna Maria was distracted, and, impelled by an uncontrollable feeling which overcame her, hung upon him, and kissed his clay-cold lips.

"She was at last drawn away to give room to the surgeon, who, examining narrowly, began to be of opinion that the wound had not reached any vital part, and observed that he must have been hurt elsewhere.

"He therefore examined him carefully, particularly about the head, and found a considerable swelling just above the ear.

"Here," said he, "is the chief injury. Can you tell me how he received it, or from what sort of weapon?"

"He got but one stroke," replied Fernando, "and that was in the shoulder."

"Then the hurt in his head has proceeded from his weight in falling; and the loss of blood from the shoulder is, in that case, rather useful than injurious."

"While they were thus speaking, Alphonso began to breathe hard, then groaned.

"The surgeon ordered a glass of water, with which he wetted his lips, letting a little down.

"Still the word was death.

"In the meantime, the officers of the Ronda had got the wounded assassins to the inn.

"One appeared, from his equipments, to be a gentleman of considerable rank, but he was in as hopeless a state as Alphonso.

"Another was in the livery of a servant, and a third had the appearance of a baron.

"The two last were coming to themselves, but the first seemed quite senseless, though he breathed.

"They were all desperately wounded, particularly the gentleman, whose arm was cloven at the joint of the shoulder almost from his body.

"As the accident happened at the distance of less than a league from the city of Burgos, Don Isidore, on his arrival at the inn, wrote off to Don Juan, informing him of the affair, and entreating proper assistance to be sent out.

"Don Juan himself arrived in two hours after the messenger was dispatched, and the King's surgeon along with him, who, on examining Alphonso, inquired whether he had indicated any disposition to vomit; and, on being

answered in the negative, declared it to be his opinion that he had only been extremely stunned by the fall, and added that, in all probability, he would soon come to himself.

"He ordered his head to be chafed with warm spirits, his extremities to be rubbed, and some warm wine poured down his throat; in short, he took his measures so well, that, before morning, the youth was restored to his senses, though extremely weak.

"Don Juan did everything he could to cheer the baron and Don Isidore, assuring them that the King intended to make ample amends to the family for the injuries it had sustained; and that he intended the first honours in the state for Alphonso, whom he loved more than any of his favourites, though much had been done to injure him in his opinion.

"Nay, such," he said, "was the attachment of the King that he would not inform him of the present accident before he came away, to avoid giving him unnecessary pain."

"When the two inferior assassins came to themselves, Don Juan, the baron, and Don Isidore, were informed of it; and, coming to the room where they were, Don Juan was immediately desecrated by him who wore the livery.

"Whose servant are you?" said Don Juan, severely.

"I am the servant of Don Rodrigo de Calvados," said the fellow.

"Oho!" said Don Juan. "And where is your master?"

"There, your honour," said the fellow, pointing significantly to a bench where the gentleman's body lay.

"Then it was he who set you on this enterprise?" said Don Juan.

"God bless your honour!" returned the fellow, "I knew not what I was going about till I was in the very heart of it. This honest man here, who looks like a devil than a man, will tell you more; I was only a servant."

"Don Juan, looking at the fellow, perceived that he was a bravo, and ordered the two to be immediately carried, under a strong guard, to jail.

"The next day, Alphonso was much recovered, but complained of a violent pain from the wound in his shoulder.

"He was, however, declared by the surgeon to be able to proceed slowly to Burgos.

"The gentleman assassin, Don Rodrigo, too, was able to proceed on a litter.

"A strong guard was ordered for him, and he was deposited in the jail, and a surgeon ordered to attend him.

"His mother was almost mad with vexation and disappointment; but all her interest, all her tears, all her falsehoods, and all her address, were of no avail—she could get no one hardy enough to apply to the King in his favour.

"During Alphonso's illness, Donna Maria constantly attended him.

"But a considerable time having elapsed, and the wound continuing in the same state, the surgeon expressed his surprise at the slowness of the process, and frequently adverted on symptoms of a feverish kind, for which he could not account.

"One day, making those remarks in the hearing of Pierot, that honest soul said that he fancied he could tell the cause of it.

"Why, what is the cause of it, wise man?" said Don Isidore.

"Love, your honour!" replied Pierot, bluntly.

"Love! In the name of God, with whom?"

"I'm sure, your honour, I don't know, and I believe it is more than he knows himself; the picture that hangs about his neck perhaps may tell, though I doubt that, too, for they were strangers."

"Are you mad, fellow?" said the baron, hastily.

"No, your worship," replied Pierot, "I am not. I hope I do the best, at least, that I can to avoid it; for I neither go out to seek fighting adventures, nor do I fall in love with every pretty girl in distress, which seems to me to be the ways of going mad nowadays. I will tell you what I know."

"He then told them of the adventure with the two ladies in Portugal, concluding with an assurance that since his young master had seen them he never had had one hour's peace, nor, he believed, been right in his head.

"Don Isidore seemed extremely uneasy.

"He retired to a room, wrote letters, and despatched a messenger with them instantly to the castle of Querro.

"The rest of the day he seemed extremely unhappy, nor could the baron, or any of his friends account for the strange alteration in his manner.

"Next day he put the question of his love, with some delicacy, to Alphonso, who candidly acknowledged that a lady he had met with on his travels in Portugal had gained entire possession of his affections, and, though he scarcely hoped ever to see her again, he could not help cherishing the love with which she inspired him, and indulging some small hopes.

"He then told his father the whole story, and concluded with showing him the picture.

"At sight of the picture, Don Isidore turned pale, his lips quivered, his whole frame trembled with the agitation of his mind.

"He was for some minutes speechless.

"At length, breaking silence, he exclaimed:

"It is as I fear! Oh, unhappy youth!"

"Good Heavens, my father!" exclaimed Alphonso. "To what strange story is this dreadful agitation a prelude?"

"Alas! my unhappy child," said Don Isidore, "prepare to hear that which must pierce your soul with horror! Yet you must know it—though instant death attend the information—you must know it! That young lady—Good Heavens! do I live to tell it to my son?—that young lady with whom you were so deeply enamoured is—your sister!"

"My sister?"

"Yes, your sister! And she, that lady, whom you rescued along with her is mine—the Marchioness Del Oro!"

"Then I am undone!" exclaimed Alphonso—"undone here, and lost to all eternity!"

"Say not so, my son," said Don Isidore. "We are to believe that the Almighty, who is merciful, will judge by the intention, and not assign the punishment of a deliberate crime to a passion involuntary and unintentional. This horror that you feel is in itself an expiation if it be followed up with a firm determination to expell the poison from your soul."

"Ah, there—there, my father—there lies the horror! I fear I must cease to live ere I cease to sin, if loving—"

"Ha!" interrupted Don Isidore, "hold your impious tongue, nor utter in my presence language so detestable! If so lost in guilt as to dare the thunder of the Almighty—which, slow to execute, emboldens sinners—dost thou not fear that a father's indignation should rise and crush you into ruin?"

"Alas, my father! How do you mistake me!" said Alphonso.

"Perhaps I do," interrupted Don Isidore. "Yet it is to me a subject of that nature, the bare imagination of which harrows up my soul. I am not fit to speak upon it! I shall therefore retire, and content myself with offering up my prayers to Heaven in your behalf, nor will I again behold you till I have firm assurance that you have banished the hellish passion even to the last shadow from your breast, or that death has snatched you from its power!"

"So saying, Don Isidore withdrew, leaving the unhappy Alphonso in a state of distraction, horror, and grief.

"It was the first time in his life that a word engendered in anger had fallen from his father, and his last expressions smote him the more poignantly to heart.

"On Don Isidore's meeting the baron and Father Thomas, they were astonished at the strange discomposure of his air and countenance.

"They were both alarmed, and, almost in a breath, asked him for Alphonso.

"Would to Heaven," said Don Isidore, "that the assassin's poniard had cut him off ere he should have lived to tell the horrid tale—he is in love with his sister!"

"They stared aghast.

"Yes," said he, after telling them the story, "it is not guilt alone that meets the scourge in this life, for I am cursed as Punalada was, and incestuous love blights my family."

"Hold—hold, Don Isidore!" interrupted the priest. "Judgment belongs to God—resignation is the duty of man; beware, therefore, that while you denounce vengeance against your son and call him sinner you are not

yourself dipping deeper in sin than he. It appears, from your own account, that at the time he first conceived this unhappy passion he knew not the object of it was his sister; in the outset, therefore, no sin is imputable, since we must believe that God judges us by our means of knowledge. To expect him, then, on the instant to dislodge a deep-rooted passion is to expect more than human nature is capable of performing. It must be the work of time and strong, virtuous resolution; and, believe me, that every effort of his to overcome it will be more acceptable in the eyes of the Almighty than ten thousand acts of mere passive, negative virtue. I know and will answer for his principles, and have no fear of the event but what arises from the state of his health. I shall, therefore, go and converse with him, and I entreat that in the meantime you will, on your part, recollect that gusts of rage and boisterous invective are, above all things, incompatible with the mild spirit of that glorious religion which all adore; though some of us, to be judged from our actions, would seem to be ignorant of it."

CHAPTER DXCIV.

EDGORTH BESS COMMENCES HER SEARCH FOR BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD, AND ENCOUNTERS JONATHAN WILD.

In a short time Father Thomas returned, with a face unusually imprinted with sorrow.

He desired that a physician should be immediately sent for, for Alphonso was raving mad.

A messenger was directly sent for a physician.

He came, and declared Alphonso to be in such a state as left little room for hope.

Exhausted as he had been already, he was afraid to bleed him, and expressed a fear that the feverish delirium would act upon the spirits, and carry him off.

"He ordered him a medicine, and, desiring to be called upon the appearance of any new symptom, went away.

"As night advanced, Alphonso grew more outrageous, and they were broken in upon at supper by the faithful Pierot, who told them that he was tearing off the dressings from his wound, and that four of them were unable to hold him.

"They all rose immediately, and went to his chamber.

"Donna Maria herself would not stay behind.

"They found him in a most dreadful state of furious insanity, tearing himself to pieces, while the blood gushed afresh from his half-healed wound, and the attendants were lying about the room, bruised by the flings he had given them against the walls.

"The baron ran directly to him, pinioned his arms behind his back, and, with the wrists of a giant, held him down.

"Don Isidore came in to his assistance, and they brought him to some order.

"In a few minutes growing insensibly weak, he languished away, and sunk into a swoon.

"By this time the surgeon who was sent for came, and prepared to re-dress his wounds.

"The patient's back was covered with blood, and he ordered it to be washed while he prepared his dressings.

"Donna Maria herself undertook the task.

"She washed away the blood, while the baron held the basin.

"Suddenly, to the astonishment of all, she screamed out:

"'Mother of God—my son!' and sank back upon the bed.

"Does it please Heaven,' said Don Isidore, 'to mock our miseries and send insanity throughout us all? Do I dream—or has this lady dreamed? Canst thou tell me, baron, whither tends all this strange, extravagant incident that marks our fortune of late and makes the adventures of our house more like romance than reality?'

"In our affairs,' replied the baron, 'the real is so interwoven with the marvellous, that the whole seems tinged with the colours of romance, and seeks the aid of proof. Such proof is now before us. This youth is her son, and my grandson. There lies proof indelibly written by the hand of nature on his body.'

"By Heaven!' exclaimed Don Isidore, 'the madness grows round, and I myself, I fear, shall shortly catch it!'

"If madness be,' returned the baron, warmly, 'it is

with yourself, Don Isidore, who hold up your own rash opinion, founded upon circumstances subject to error and imposition, against the testimony of nature itself, and boldly confront the written characters of Providence. Behold those grapes, painted by the hand of nature!'

"Just at this moment, the lady, who had been supported by Father Thomas, came to herself.

"Give me—give me my child!' she said.

"If I live,' said the baron, 'some strange fraud has been practised on us both—a fraud most likely never to be developed. That Gonzalvo's son has exactly this mark I can give testimony. Now let us see whether Fernando has it.'

"Fernando declared that he had not.

"Then it is certain,' said the baron, 'that this is the son of Gonzalvo.'

"It is strange,' said Don Isidore—'it is beyond all comprehension strange that a child nursed under the inspection of—But what do I say? To-morrow I will send off to Talavera and have the old woman, at whose place he was nursed, brought, with her whole family, here.'

"Reserve your arguments,' said Father Thomas, 'to a fitter occasion. At present let us look to the lady, who seems to stand in need of care little less than the young gentleman.'

"The next morning Pierot was despatched to the village near Talavera to bring the old woman who had been nurse to Don Isidore's lady, her whole family, and the nurse who was employed to suckle their child, directly to Burgos, but with strict injunctions not to apprise them of a sentence that had passed.

"During this juncture Alphonso's fever had a fortunate crisis.

"He recovered the use of his senses, and, though extremely weak, gave some hopes of recovery.

"It was thought advisable to keep the discovery a secret from him till such proof should be had as would put it past a doubt one way or other.

"At length Pierot returned, and with him the nurse who had suckled Don Isidore's child, and her husband, the old woman having been for some time dead.

"Don Isidore ordered them to be conducted into the room where Donna Maria was, and where the baron, Father Thomas, and Fernando attended.

"It was agreed that Father Thomas should speak to her.

"Nurse,' said he, 'I presume you are well enough acquainted with the principles of our holy religion, and the extent to which they reach, to know the dreadful punishment attending any kind of fraud. If you do not, I will tell you, that, however it may be concealed from mortal eyes, it cannot be concealed from the Almighty, who will not fail to punish it with everlasting torments. When detected here, it meets the heaviest punishment of the law. Of both these, nurse, you and your husband stand in imminent danger; nor can anything but a fair confession save you from being handed over instantly to the cognizance of criminal law. Answer me, then, as you hope for mercy here or salvation hereafter, where is the child of Don Isidore de Haro, whom you, for purposes best known to yourselves, have changed, imposing for so many years upon him the charge of a child not his own; while, on the other hand, you may have devoted his to misery, want, or even death? Speak the truth, and, believe me, nothing else can save you, for, of one part of the charge against you, we have unquestionable evidence.'

"I will, father—I will!' exclaimed the nurse, throwing herself on her knees. 'I will tell the truth; and though, to save myself from ruin, I was guilty of concealing the story from Don Isidore, I am as innocent as the child unborn of the changing, as you shall know.'

"One day, after I had brought Don Isidore's child home to nurse, a woman with a child on her breast called in towards the close of the day, said she was a traveller, and begged a lodging. She added that she was travelling from Andalusia to Saragossa, and must be away by break of day next morning. As we never refused a Christian shelter, we ordered her to stay, and gave her a share of what we had. The weather was extremely hot, and we all lay on mats in the piazza of our cottage. Just at day-break we heard the stranger move. She got up and bid us adieu, and went away. We wished her to stay for breakfast, but she refused, alleging that she had a long journey before her, and must not delay.

"When we arose, the child was asleep in the cradle, so that, altogether, the woman had been gone three hours before I went to take it up. Guess my sorrow and surprise when I found that the vile wretch had changed the child. I knew it directly by a bunch of grapes on the back, though in other respects the children were very like each other."

"Why did you not tell Don Isidore, then?" said the priest.

"Had I been inclined to do so," replied the woman, "it would have been impossible, for he and his lady, we were told, had gone into France. But you shall hear. I ran directly to my husband, who was at work, and told him. He was going to kill me with his sickle. He immediately broke off from work and went in pursuit of her, charging me to say nothing till his return, as he was pretty sure of overtaking her. But, Heaven help us! he was all the time going further from her, for we afterwards found that she had told us wrong, and was going towards Andalusia, instead of returning from it. At night he returned, weary and broken-hearted. We knew not what to do. We feared to discover the matter, and thought it best to leave it to chance. The thing passed on. The old woman, my lady's nurse, was deceived, and, finding that we had no reason to fear a discovery, we thought it best, as it could not be remedied, to say nothing. This, I call God and our Redeemer to witness, is the whole truth, and I hope you will think that I am not so much to be blamed."

"Just as they had finished examining the woman, a letter came, directed to the baron.

"It was from the King's officer at Punalada Castle, and was in these words:—

"MOST EXCELLENT LORD,—

"In our searches through the many subterranean vaults under this castle, we found, starved almost to death, a woman, who says she has been confined many years by the marquess. She imagined at least fifty years, but that, from her story, is impossible. She adds that she has a secret of the utmost consequence to unfold—briefly to this effect:—

"She was nurse of Don Henrico Gonzalvo's son—was seduced by a priest (whom I suppose to be the prior) to give up the child to the marquess—that at last being prevailed upon, she travelled with it towards Andalusia, and falling by accident into where a child of Don Isidore de Haro's (whom she knew to be the cousin of Gonzalvo) was at nurse, she determined to save the child whom she loved from the intentions of the marquess, which she thought might possibly be wicked, and accordingly left Don Gonzalvo's in the bed, and carried away Don Isidore's. So, by this account, the youth Fernando, it is probable, is Don Isidore's, and the other your grandchild. The woman is in custody, so take your measures accordingly.

"P. S.—The woman is dying, and has made an oath to this effect."

"Here," said the baron, giving the letter to Don Isidore, "all is cleared up. Fernando is yours—Alphonso is mine."

"Alphonso shall still be mine," replied Don Isidore, for he shall be married to my daughter. I wrote to my sister, who arrived at Querro Castle the day after we left it, from Portugal, whence she was obliged to fly to escape the importunities and power of an old nobleman, who had fallen in love with my daughter. She wrote me an account of her rescue by a young Spaniard, long since from Seville. I have now received her answer to my letter, and am happy to find that the impression Alphonso made upon her niece keeps pace with his love for her. When Pierot first hinted the affair, I suspected the fact just as it turned out. Come, baron," continued Don Isidore, "let us give a loose to joy—each of us has gained without the other being a loser, and these events, which at first appeared so adverse, will serve to unite our families by additional bonds of affection."

"The body of Gonzalvo was buried in great pomp at Montalto.

"Soon after, Alphonso received Don Isidore's daughter to his arms.

"He was also invested with half the estates of the marquess, by the King; the other half, with Punalada Castle, being, by his desire, settled on Fernando, who inherited also his grandfather Guzman's estate.

"Don Rodrigo was sent to the mines.

"His mother was condemned to banishment.

"And the prior of the Convent of Vallesauto was doomed to perpetual imprisonment in the Inquisition.

"Father Thomas received the priory as a gift, from the hands of the Archbishop of Seville.

"Lastly, the baron lived, not only to see Alphonso and Fernando the first warriors in Spain, and created barons, but to instruct a great-grandson in the rudiments of the science of warfare.

"And at last died at an amazing age, surrounded by a numerous race of heroes, the descendants of the old and illustrious HOUSE OF RAYO."

Edgworth Bess closed the volume with a sigh.

Looking up, she was surprised to find that night had already come.

The perusal of the volume had occupied her for many hours.

It answered its purpose admirably.

In the deep interest she felt in the fortunes of the various characters, she forgot for awhile her own troubles and misfortunes.

She saw how, after a length of time, those who had been sorely tried were made happy at last, and she wondered whether such would be her own fate.

She hoped so, and that was why she sighed.

At this moment the kind-hearted landlady entered.

"You have been interested?" she said, interrogatively.

"I have."

"I knowed you would be, because my old man was so uncommon fond of reading it."

"I am deeply—deeply grateful to you for all your kindness to me," said Edgworth Bess. "Believe me, I am not what I seem, and I trust the day will come when I shall be able to reward you."

"Reward?—I want no reward! It's but a trifle I've done, and I'd do more any time for the man who brought you here."

"You are very kind, but I must depart. Night has come, and my search must commence."

"Nay—nay, I do not intend that we should part thus! You must take some refreshment before you go."

With much difficulty Edgworth Bess suffered herself to be persuaded to partake of a frugal meal.

She was exceedingly anxious to go on, but yet she was prudent enough to remember that it would be well to embrace this offer, for how could she tell when she should be able to obtain another meal.

At length she took her departure.

The last words uttered by the landlady were:

"Remember that while I live here you need never want for shelter or a friend. I like you much; so do not forget. If you are disappointed in your search, do not fail to come back to me."

"I will not—I will not," said the poor girl, weeping, for she was so unaccustomed to words of kindness that when they fell upon her ears they drew forth a torrent of tears.

As a parting gift, the landlady placed in her hands a small sum of money.

After this, Edgworth Bess quitted the safe shelter of that happy roof.

Out into the streets she went upon, alas! an utterly vain expedition.

She was running no trifling danger, too, for there was the danger that she might encounter her worst persecutor, Wild junior.

In what direction to look for her two staunch protectors, Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, she knew not.

She had nothing but chance to guide her.

Her first thought was to repair to the house in Westminster, and inquire of the people who lived there whether they had seen anything of her protectors.

But this idea was rejected almost immediately.

She remembered that she had seen Wild junior on the road before her.

Beyond all doubt, he would make his way to that very spot, expecting to hear tidings of her there.

Then, he would not be likely to leave without placing some kind of watch near the spot.

Above all, however, Edgworth Bess was firmly im-

pressed with the idea that the people who kept the house were in the pay of her persecutor.

Under these circumstances, therefore, it was manifestly unwise to go anywhere near the locality of Westminster.

Yet, on the other hand, Jack Sheppard and Blueskin might be there.

The night was dark and drear.

A chill wind blew off the surface of the Thames, causing her to wrap her scanty clothing close around her.

Onward she went, wildly, foolishly, aimlessly, knowing not whither.

At length she paused.

The streets were almost deserted, and suddenly voices struck upon her ear.

She listened, and as she did so her heart grew still.

The voices came nearer.

She recognised them.

They were those of Wild junior and his associate, Nicholson.

Edgworth Bess was so alarmed at this sudden rencounter that she knew not what to do.

Her limbs failed her.

Louder and louder grew the voices.

Nearer and nearer came the two men she so much dreaded.

The street was a quiet and deserted one.

How easy it would be for them to spring upon her, to overpower her, before anyone would have time to hasten to her assistance.

What should she do?

She feared she was about to fall on the pavement, and she stretched out her hands to save herself.

Her fingers encountered wood-work.

Mechanically she looked up, and, as she did so, her heart once more became animated with hope.

It was a portion of an old projecting doorway which she had grasped.

Terror left her sufficiently in possession of her faculties for her to be aware that it was scarcely possible Wild and his companion were aware of her presence in that street.

How easy, then, to hide.

She had but to ascend a couple of steps and conceal herself in the shadow of the doorway.

Unsuspecting, and not knowing her presence there, surely they would pass on.

With trembling limbs, she crept into the shadow.

On came her foes.

She crouched down in one corner, and, breathless with dread, awaited the result of her experiment.

Would they find her?

That was the question, and, in spite of common sense, her fears suggested the worst to her.

CHAPTER DXCVI.

ONCE MORE RETURNS TO BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD.

BEFORE we narrate the strange adventures which befel Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes in the garden of the house to let, we will return for a brief space to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, of whom we have so long lost sight.

No doubt the reader will remember when and under what circumstances it was we left them.

It was after their horrible discovery of the dead bodies in the post-chaise.

By whom those murders had been committed there was no evidence to show; but our friends jumped immediately to the conclusion that no other person living could be guilty of such a deed save Jonathan Wild.

They were forced to beat a rather precipitate retreat, for they heard a troop of horsemen approaching.

They would stop at the post-chaise, and as soon as they ascertained the state of affairs, would push on at full speed, in order, if possible, to capture those who had committed such a dastardly crime.

The officers caught sight of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard when they halted on the top of the hill, and they pushed forward with redoubled speed.

Our two friends were much alarmed, for they feared, and with justice, that the murders would be laid to their charge.

If this was so they would have great difficulty in clearing themselves from the accusation. Indeed, it is questionable whether they would succeed in doing so at all.

With these few words of explanation we resume.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard galloped on at full speed down the hill, and, as soon as they reached level ground, looked about them for some place where they could shelter themselves, or get out of sight of their foes.

But no place whatever presented itself that afforded the least prospect of answering their purpose.

They had no resource but to gallop on at the top of their speed.

Suddenly, Jack stopped.

"What are you pulling up for?" cried Blueskin, in the utmost astonishment.

"Here!"

"What is it?" asked Blueskin, stopping also, and placing himself beside his comrade.

"What is to be done?" asked Jack. "My horse has fallen dead lame!"

"Confusion!"

"What is to be done now?"

"I know not."

"Nor I."

"Cannot you make him move at all?"

"See."

Jack attempted to put his horse in motion.

The creature limped a few steps painfully.

"How awkward!" said Blueskin, looking apprehensively behind him.

He expected each instant to see the officers appear at the top of the hill.

"It is in the near fore-foot, Jack," he added.

"I know that."

"What is the cause?"

"Galloping too hard down hill, I suppose."

"Alight."

"It will be no good."

"It is your only chance. Look at his foot. It may be a stone or something of that sort."

Jack was in a desponding mood, and so he shook his head.

"I don't think that is the cause," he said.

"Look and see."

Jack alighted.

He was ready to give himself up for lost.

The reason was because he felt so bitterly disappointed.

It was foolish, but he had imagined that it would be an easy enough matter to get upon Jonathan's track, and to wrest Edgworth Bess from him.

Instead, however, of this, they had failed to obtain anything that might be called a clue.

Now they were themselves pursued, and from what he knew of the pertinacity of police officers, he was aware it would be no easy matter to shake them off.

This was why he was so dispirited.

He stooped down and raised his horse's foot.

The moment he did so, an ejaculation escaped his lips.

"Ha!" he said. "I could not have believed this!"

"What?"

"It is a stone in his shoe after all."

"Out with it, then, and be quick!"

"All right!"

"The officers have reached the top of the hill!"

"Curse them!"

"They see us!"

"They cannot fail to do so!" replied Jack, busily engaged in extracting the stone.

It resisted his efforts entirely, and he began to be afraid that after the stone was out his horse would still be lame in consequence of the tightness with which it was wedged in.

"They wave their arms!" cried Blueskin, who was watching keenly all the movements of the police officers.

"Are they coming?"

"Yes—they are descending the hill at full speed."

"Wait a moment!"

"Are you ready?"

"Nearly! Ah! That will do!"

The stone at last fell to the ground.

"I am afraid, Blue—"

"Of what?"

"That his foot is injured."

"Never mind fearing! You seem quite depressed."

"I am—I am."



[THE TERROR OF EDGWORTH BESS AT THE APPROACH OF WILD JUNIOR.]

"Shake off the feeling, then! Mount, and gallop away. We shall soon get rid of our pursuers, and then remember what we have to do."

"Do not remind me of it."

As he spoke, Jack mounted.

The officers now were very close behind.

They had been making strenuous efforts to overtake our friends.

They did not recognise them at present.

It was probable they would do so, however, if they came much nearer.

"Hold—hold!" they cried, in chorus. "Hold, in the King's name! Surrender, or we fire!"

Of course Blueskin and Jack paid no sort of attention to this speech.

Not without many misgivings, Jack put spurs to his steed.

The creature's foot was evidently very tender and painful, for it limped at every step.

No 130.—BLUESKIN.

"On—on!" cried Blueskin. "Pay no attention to that. It will soon wear off! On, I say, without you are tired of your life!"

Goaded by the spur, Jack's horse galloped on.

As Blueskin had prophesied, the stiffness to a great extent wore off, and the animal moved more freely.

They were pleased to find that they were gradually getting away from the police officers.

At length the distance was much increased.

Nevertheless, their foes hung on perseveringly in the rear. Presently Blueskin cried:

"Ah, Jack, I have a thought! Forward—forward: we shall do them yet! I know where I am now! Hurrah! we shall get rid of them nicely!"

Jack was surprised at his comrade's exultation, and wondered what could be the cause of it.

"What have you thought of, Blue?" he asked.

"Follow me, and I will tell you. Over that hedge first, and across the meadows!"

"All right."

As he spoke, Blueskin backed his horse so as to be in readiness to take the leap.

Jack followed his example.

The hedge was not a high one.

Had it been, their horses in their present exhausted condition, might have jumped short.

In another instant both alighted safely in the meadow beyond.

The officers were so close behind that the fugitives could hear them utter a shout as they beheld the execution of this feat.

"Come on, Jack!" cried Blueskin, "keep close to me! Make good speed while we can!"

"They have jumped the hedge as well," said Jack, looking back.

"Never mind."

"They are gaining upon us too—I am sure of it."

"Forward, then, or we may be too late."

"Too late for what?"

"For my scheme to be of any good."

"What is it?"

"Wait another moment, and you will see. I can show you better than I can explain."

Jack's curiosity was roused.

Perhaps Blueskin was aware that his words would produce this effect upon Jack, and cause him to urge his horse to better speed.

As for Blueskin himself, he was more apprehensive about the safety of Edgworth Bess than he liked to confess even to Jack.

Every moment that she remained in Wild's power was an additional danger.

On her account more than his own, he was anxious to outdistance the officers.

Capture would be the destruction not only of themselves, but Edgworth Bess as well.

He directed his course straight across the meadows, Jack still following him closely.

Suddenly they came in sight of a large sheet of water which threatened to put a stop to further progress in the direction they were taking.

Jack looked right and left, and saw it was a river.

It was broad, and the current powerful and swift.

"There you are, Jack," cried Blueskin; "you can guess now what I intend to do."

"Perhaps I can."

"You must not mind a wet skin; it will be rather uncomfortable, I know."

"Then you are going to attempt to swim across that stream?"

"Yes; I believe we can do it safely."

"Then our foes will follow us."

"I don't know that. The passage looks far more dangerous than it is in reality."

"The current seems very strong."

"That's almost a deception."

"How do you know that?"

"I once swam across, many years ago, myself."

"And the passage was not difficult?"

"Not very; yet, of course, not without danger. But here we are upon the brink. Now, then, forward, the horses will swim, and the current will carry us some distance lower down before we can reach the opposite side. This will be an advantage to us, for the river is wider there."

Another loud shout came from the police officers in the rear, and if Jack Sheppard had up to that moment any hesitation about doing as his companion advised, it vanished then.

The horses seemed by no means willing to plunge into the water, but, urged by the spur, they were compelled to do so.

No sooner did they feel themselves in the water than, with a natural instinct, they struck out with their feet and swam excellently.

He directed their heads to the opposite shore; but, as Blueskin had mentioned, instead of reaching it in a straight line, they were carried towards it in an oblique direction.

Luckily for the fugitives, the current carried them away from their pursuers.

Glancing back, Blueskin saw the officers rein-up suddenly on the brink of the river.

They were gesticulating fiercely, and no doubt were holding some kind of consultation.

Some appeared willing to plunge into the stream and run the risk, but others held back and shook their heads.

In the absence of any commander, they did nothing, but remained in a state of indecision.

"Blueskin," cried Jack, "are we safe?"

"I hope so."

"Is there any other means of crossing the stream than the one we have adopted?"

"None of any service. There's a bridge, but then it's two miles from here nearer to London."

"Then, if they attempt to cross over by that, we shall be all right?"

"Yes, I think we are all right now. Look!"

Jack did so.

The officers were still pausing at the edge of the river, debating as to what they should do, and watching the fugitives.

To them the feat appeared to be a very perilous one.

To a certain extent, they were desirous of doing their duty, of course, yet at the same time they endeavoured to preserve their own persons from injury as much as possible.

They dreaded pistol-shots more than anyone would have imagined; and, as to the water, they did not like the idea at all.

In England, swimming never has been anything like a general accomplishment, and, of all the officers, there was not one who had learned this useful art.

To them, the passage of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard seemed full of the utmost danger.

They were carried along at an exceedingly rapid rate by the current.

Therefore, as the officers were resolved not to imperil their lives by drowning, they remained watching and consulting until the fugitives landed safely on the opposite shore.

"Come—come," said one of them at this juncture, "this sort of thing won't do, you know."

"What will, then?"

"Why, when it is known that we have lost those two murderers through not following them across this river, we shall be reprimanded."

"Oh, bother!"

"We shall, and you all know that as well as I do. They will say, the fugitives could cross over safely, and so could we."

"Well, then, if that's your way of thinking, why don't you take your horse into the river and show us the example of swimming across?"

"I am not going to be the only one," was the reply; "without you all join me, I sha'n't."

"Look here," said another, "the best thing I can propose is this."

"What—what?"

"Lower down there is a bridge; let us gallop towards that, and ride over it, and then continue the pursuit. We may come up with 'em after all; and if we don't, the fact of our keeping up the chase will look as though we tried our best to capture them."

After much time had been lost in discussion, this plan was agreed upon, and the officers galloped off to the bridge.

Their only hope was that Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, when they got on the opposite side of the stream, would be lulled into a state of false security.

If this was so, there was a chance, and just a chance, that they would be able to come upon them at unawares.

Whether they succeeded or not in this attempt, or whether they had to abandon the chase as altogether hopeless, time alone can show.

CHAPTER DXXVII.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES SUCCEED IN MAKING THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE GARDEN OF THE HOUSE TO LET.

It is now time to return to Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes.

When we last left them, it was in the garden attached to the mysterious empty house.

Fortune had favoured the two villains so far as to enable them to escape into the open air undetected.

Wild, to Noakes's infinite relief, professed himself exceedingly anxious to be gone.

But the reflection which the past events had created filled his breast with rage and mortification.

It vividly brought back to him the time when he had held a position exactly opposite to his present one.

He had given utterance to some foolish regrets, and some equally foolish threats of what he would do should he once again succeed in obtaining his former power.

Of his doing this, however, the probability was slight. To these ravings—properly speaking, they could be called nothing else—Mr. Noakes paid no attention.

His desire to leave that place had by no means abated. If anything, it had increased.

Therefore, while Wild was pouring out these speeches, and making fierce stabs and thrusts at the air, as though it was a mortal enemy, Mr. Noakes was looking in every direction for their horses.

"Where are they?" he had exclaimed. "I can't see them."

"Curse you and the horses too!"

"What for?"

"You think of nothing else."

"Take my advice, Mr. Wild."

"Bah!—I don't want it."

"You will dally here until it is too late. Those men inside are desperate characters, and would not shrink from a trifle. Let us mount and depart."

"Get the horses, then, and don't stand chattering there."

"Come with me," returned Noakes, endeavouring to show as much spirit as he could. "I don't intend to wander about and look for them myself."

The change in his companion's manner could not fail to attract Jonathan Wild, and the last words appeared to have the effect of bringing him to his senses.

"Come," he said, gruffly, "let us make no more fuss about it—let us seek them and begone."

"Willingly."

"But, from the bottom of my heart, I wish I had had anyone for a comrade but yourself."

"Then let us part, Mr. Wild; I don't desire your company, and we can't agree."

"You would like to go, no doubt," was the reply, "but you shall not while you are alive."

"But I promise—I will swear—"

"I wouldn't believe a thousand of your oaths, and so be silent. It doesn't suit me to part with you."

"I wish it did."

"I know you too well, Noakes; don't think you deceive me as to your character."

"You labour under a mistake."

"I know the first use you would make of your liberty if we parted."

"You do not."

"I do," was the reply. "You would go straight and surrender yourself to the authorities, and give evidence against me, by which means you would probably obtain your own pardon."

"No, no, Mr. Wild—believe me, I would not run that risk."

"Hold—no more."

"Let me speak; now that the subject has been mentioned, let the point be settled once for all."

"It is settled now."

"But will you not believe me, Mr. Wild, that if we part I would take every pains to get out of this hateful country as soon as I could?"

"Noakes."

"What?"

"Do you hear me?"

"Of course I do."

"Then understand that there is one thing, and one thing only that can divide us, and perhaps that may not do so."

"What is it?"

"Death!" was the reply, "Until you die or I die, or until Fate overtakes us both, you shall never leave me! Now, stop it, I want to hear no more."

"But—"

"Let it be sufficient you know your destiny; for the future it is linked with mine, and nothing can break it. I

advise you, then, to make yourself as comfortable as you are able; but you can please yourself about that—I don't care. Now, then, for the horses."

So saying, Wild began in good earnest to search about among the trees for his steed.

This was no easy task.

From long neglect the whole of the ground had been thickly covered with trailing vegetation that made walking almost impossible.

Suddenly, however, they perceived a flash of light at one of the windows of the mansion.

"I told you how it would be," cried Noakes, in a triumphant voice. "You have wasted time that ought to have been occupied in galloping away. Now we shall find ourselves unable to move."

"Silence, fool!" was the reply. "Look about you and secure the horses."

The flash of light was followed by another and another, so that it would seem that a discovery of some kind had been made, and one of no small importance.

Presently, Jonathan Wild sprang forward suddenly. "Hurrah!" he cried. "I have my horse now. Noakes, where is yours? it will be close to this no doubt."

Noakes looked around, and directly afterwards saw his own steed.

It allowed itself to be caught unresistingly, and the two companions in crime hastened to seat themselves in the saddles.

By this time, however, a general alarm pervaded the premises.

They could hear the loud murmuring of voices, and then presently a door was dashed violently open.

A crowd of persons rushed tumultuously into the garden.

Many carried bright lights, so that the whole scene around was rapidly revealed.

Shading their eyes with their hands, they looked carefully around them.

Then a voice exclaimed:

"There they are—there they are!"

"Where?" shouted a chorus of voices.

The speaker raised his hand and pointed.

"They are on horseback, yonder. They go, look—look, we are betrayed! Our own lives and our own safety demand the death of those spies!"

"To the gate," cried another—"to the gate—there is no other means of escape but that; let us intercept them there and slay them!"

"That's the play! This way—quick, my friends—quick: there is not a second to be lost!"

With a sudden rush the whole party dashed through the garden in the direction of the gate.

Doubtless they were well acquainted with its exact position, and would be able to reach it in the briefest possible space of time.

But Wild and Noakes possessed no such knowledge.

The only advantage they had consisted in their being mounted, while the others were on foot.

Chance alone, however, could guide them to the gate.

"Follow me closely, Noakes. Draw your sword and be in readiness for action! Now, then, quick!"

The horses stumbled once or twice, and made their way with great difficulty through the tangled weeds and briars.

The particular faculty of being able to see with tolerable distinctness when all was obscurity around, rendered Wild good service on this occasion.

It must not be forgotten that he had found his way from the house to the gate, and had admitted the conspirators.

To some extent he had noted the position of different objects, and all at once a cry of satisfaction escaped his lips.

"Here is the gate, Noakes," he cried. "I will have it open in a second! Fortunately, it is only bolted."

Jonathan alighted, drew back the bolt, and flung the door open.

But before he could seat himself again in the saddle, the conspirators made their appearance upon the scene.

All had their swords drawn, and they made a violent and terrific attack upon Noakes.

To escape them, he touched his horse with the spur, and bounded out of the gate, leaving Jonathan to contend against his enemies as best he might.

With something of his former strength and spirit, Jonathan Wild uttered a terrific howl, and swung his heavy sword around him.

It beat down those of the conspirators as though they had been mere laths, and before they could recover guard again, he had darted through the doorway and disappeared.

Undauntedly, however, those who had attacked him pressed forward.

"Noakes," he cried—"Noakes, where are you?"

There was no response to his words.

But as he listened, he fancied he could hear the faint clatter of a horse's hoofs.

"He's trying to give me the slip!" he ejaculated. "Well, no matter, I will overtake him before he goes many yards."

Satisfied that his companion was on the road before him, Jonathan urged his horse forward by every means he could think of.

The poor beast was thoroughly tortured and maddened by pain.

It tore along at a speed, such as it had never before made in the whole course of its existence.

Plainer and plainer grew the clatter of horse's hoofs before him.

The house to let was left far in the rear.

Of the conspirators nothing could be seen.

A few minutes more of that headlong pace brought Wild on a level with Mr. Noakes.

That worthy heard him coming, and tried his utmost to get away.

But it was in vain.

His horse could not proceed at such a rate as Wild's did.

"So you thought to get away from me, did you?" cried Jonathan, savagely. "I've a good mind to make you feel it! Don't try it another time. You will be unwise to arouse my temper!"

"You are mistaken," said Noakes. "Did you think I was trying to get away from you?"

"It looked d—nably like it!" was the reply. "You left me in the lurch and galloped off at full speed; but you see you have failed on this occasion, when you had such an excellent opportunity, and so you will do, no matter how often you try it on."

Mr. Noakes muttered something, but what it was Wild could not distinctly hear, nor did he trouble himself to ask for the speech to be repeated.

As he looked around him, he perceived various indications of the approach of morning.

Travelling by daylight was exceedingly dangerous, or, at least, by no means so safe as travelling by night.

Therefore Jonathan began to seek for some place where he could obtain temporary shelter.

Nothing that seemed in any way calculated to answer his purpose met his view.

But they appeared to be in a very thinly-populated part of the country—a part where there did not seem much likelihood of meeting with persons who would observe their movements.

Accordingly, Wild continued to push on until the day had fairly begun.

The sun was high in the heavens, and the whole scene around them presented a delightful aspect.

But Jonathan saw nothing pleasing in it.

CHAPTER DXCVIII.

JONATHAN WILD SHOOTS THE GAMEKEEPER.

As the day progressed, Jonathan Wild became more and more alive to the necessity of seeking out some place where he could remain in concealment until nightfall.

Still he was unable to see anything that suited him.

In the distance was a windmill, and, from the appearance of it, it seemed to be deserted and half in ruins.

He could not fancy the idea of taking up his quarters there, however, and as his eye fell upon it he shook his head.

He recollected his last unpleasant adventure, and the narrow escape he had had from capture.

Then a little way off on the left was a dense mass of trees.

Beneath the shelter of these they could surely conceal themselves.

And yet Jonathan felt a repugnance to going towards it. As, however, no other place offered itself, it became a matter of necessity.

Accordingly he directed his horse's head towards it, after having first satisfied himself by a scrutinising gaze that no human being was in sight.

Mr. Noakes preserved a deep and sullen silence.

There was a look of extreme chagrin upon his countenance, from which it might be presumed that he was greatly disappointed at his failure to escape from the clutches of Jonathan Wild.

That such was his hope and intention is pretty evident, in spite of all that he said to the contrary.

At length the shadow of the trees was reached.

Before they had gone many paces, Jonathan observed a narrow, beaten path.

This he resolved to follow.

It was only a few yards in length, and terminated before a rude stone building.

It was only about six feet in height, and formed of pieces of stone rudely piled together.

In front was an old weatherbeaten door, which hung half open on its hinges.

From the appearance of the place it would seem that at some time or other some person had taken up his quarters there.

Whether or not it was occupied now, Wild could not precisely tell, but he resolved speedily to satisfy himself upon this point.

Alighting, therefore, from his horse, he led him by the bridle towards the door.

Mr. Noakes imitated his actions.

"All is well," said Jonathan, suddenly, as, throwing the door open, he revealed a small, irregularly-shaped chamber, scarcely more than ten feet in area.

"Queer place this," said Wild.

"Very. What can it have been, I wonder?"

"I don't care one jot," cried Wild, "what it has been, so long as it serves our present purpose—that is all we have to look after."

"How still the place is," continued Jonathan. "I think we shall be safe here for the remainder of the day."

"I trust so. What shall we do with the horses?"

"Don't turn them loose—secure them in some way to a tree, so that they cannot stray far; it might be necessary for us to mount them suddenly and ride off."

The rein was unbuckled from the bit on one side and used as a tether to keep the horses near one spot.

The cattle being thus disposed of, Wild and Noakes returned to the singular-looking building.

There was scarcely room for both of them inside it, but nevertheless they contrived to squeeze themselves in.

On one of the stones larger than the rest Jonathan perceived presently a rude kind of inscription.

Not without some difficulty, he partially made it out.

"I can explain the meaning of this now, I think," he said, addressing his companion. "Look at that inscription. I make it out to be that some old bigot, who has amused himself by playing at being a hermit, has made it his cell."

Noakes looked, and saw that the inscription ran to that effect.

It also stated that the place had been erected by the said hermit himself.

"Never mind him," said Wild, "so long as we can remain secure from observation. That is the great point."

That they would be successful in this seemed very probable.

A hermit's cell would certainly be situated in the most out-of-the-way spot that could be thought of.

There was little fear of anyone paying it a visit, and, having made themselves as comfortable as the nature of the place would permit, the two villains waited patiently for nightfall.

Ere long, however, the pangs of hunger began to make themselves felt, and, in order to satisfy them, Jonathan shot a couple of birds that happened to alight at no great distance.

They were pheasants, and this made Jonathan wonder whether the place he was in was used as a preserve for game.

He bestowed scarcely a second thought upon it, but set to work along with Noakes in preparing a meal.

In this manner time wore away, Mr. Noakes remaining

silent, except when some question was addressed to him by Wild.

At last Jonathan exclaimed:

"Oh, if I could but be revenged upon my chief enemies, I should be content—that is all that I desire!"

"And in attempting to gratify it," was the reply, "you will bring ruin down upon your head."

"I have failed as yet, but success will come at last! Assist me, Noakes, in this, and you will have cause for gratulation."

"Why so?"

"Because, as soon as ever my revenge is gratified, I will go straight away from England and never set foot upon its shores again."

Noakes was silent.

"Indeed," continued Wild, "I am growing so weary of being hunted up and down, that there are moments when I feel more than half inclined to forego my schemes and set out for the sea-coast at once."

After such an admission as this, it was not likely that Noakes could forbear from urging his favourite point.

"Abandon all thoughts of revenge," he said; "your enemies are by far too powerful for you to reach them. While there is yet time, make your escape; do not leave it until too late."

"I will think of it," was the reply—"I will think of it."

Some time afterwards, Jonathan laid himself down to sleep, giving Noakes strict injunctions to keep watch.

It was not that he stood so much in need of slumber, though he could not tell what would happen during the night that was approaching, nor could he be certain how long a time would elapse before he had an opportunity of sleeping again.

In this manner, slowly and tediously enough, the hours passed by, until darkness came.

As soon as they judged it prudent to leave, they got their horses in readiness for the road, and mounted.

Ere they had gone ten steps, however, they heard a crashing of branches, and the next moment a man appeared.

He was attired as a gamekeeper, and in one hand he carried a gun.

"Hold!" he shouted. "So I've found out who it is that poaches here at last? Now, then, give up quietly, will you? If you don't, I'll fetch you down with this gun—it is well loaded with slugs!"

So saying, the gamekeeper placed the gun to his shoulder, and pointed it at the heads of Noakes and Wild.

The latter was in anything but an agreeable humour, and this interruption exasperated him to a degree.

"Take that!" he cried, as soon as the gamekeeper had finished his speech.

While uttering these words, Jonathan, with great suddenness, drew forth a pistol.

He aimed it full in the man's face, and pulled the trigger.

A report instantly succeeded, and the man, staggering back, sunk upon the ground.

"Now, then, Noakes, forward!" cried Jonathan. "We must get clear of this spot pretty quick! That shot will bring all the rest of the keepers round us, no doubt!"

Mr. Noakes was terrified, and required but little urging. At full speed they galloped out of the little wood, and were speedily on the high-road.

The darkness favoured them greatly, and, after going for some distance at a rapid pace, Jonathan slackened his horse's speed.

"It's all right!" he cried, looking back. "There's no pursuit, and if we go on at this headlong rate, we shall attract attention."

Noakes was still surly, so he reined-in his horse without making any reply.

Every hour he was growing more and more exasperated with his companion's conduct.

Above all did this encounter with the gamekeeper enrage him.

Their purpose in riding away from London had been to get to some place where they could keep quiet for awhile.

So far from having done this, Wild had, wherever he went, left a mark of blood behind him, or else committed such acts as could not fail to draw down universal attention.

Remonstrance he had found perfectly useless.

There was only, indeed, one thing he could think of, and that was to give Jonathan the slip at the very first opportunity that occurred.

His former failure told him this would be no easy matter, yet he pondered over the idea in his mind, and was not without the hope that he should hit upon some means of ensuring success.

Of course Wild could not fail to notice his companion's unusual silence.

It vexed him, for he always found it a great relief to talk.

At length he asked:

"What are you so silent for, Noakes?"

"Because it's no good for me to speak."

The words and tone in which they were uttered told him there was such a thing as drawing a cord too tightly.

He might exasperate Noakes to such a degree that, in his blind rage, he would commit some foolish deed which would involve the destruction of both.

It would have vexed Jonathan greatly to have been left alone, and therefore, had he been ever so sure that Noakes would not betray him, he would not have given his consent to a parting.

For the first time for a very long period, Jonathan Wild gave himself up to a little serious thought.

He pondered soberly over everything, and the more he reflected the more unsafe and perilous his position seemed to be.

Looking at things with a calm eye, and judging dispassionately, he could not avoid coming to the conclusion that ere long there must be an end to the present state of things.

He was not without experience in such matters, and he knew, however daring and successful a course might have been pursued by anyone, the result was always the same.

"I must be speedy in what I have to do," he muttered, in a half-audible tone; "there must be no time lost now; all my energies must be bent in one direction. Revenge and safety—those are the two things I must ever keep before me. When I have satisfied the first, I shall be content to remain quiet anywhere—the chief object of my life will have been attained. Then will come the question, what shall I do with Noakes—how shall I dispose of him?"

Hearing his name mentioned, the latter turned half round in the saddle, and exclaimed:

"What did you say, Mr. Wild?"

CHAPTER DXCIX.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES COME TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING WITH ONE ANOTHER.

"NOTHING—nothing!" replied Wild, hastily, and in some confusion, for upon hearing the question asked, his first thought was that he had been overheard in his plottings.

If such was the case it was quite certain it would widen the breach already between them.

Not without anxiety, then, he glanced furtively into the countenance of his companion.

"I thought I heard you mention my name," returned Noakes. "I was not quite sure—I was thinking."

Jonathan gave a sigh of relief.

"You were mistaken," he said. "What were you thinking of?"

"I was cursing the hour when chance first threw you in my way! It is through you, and you alone that I owe all my misfortunes! Had I not listened to your voice I should, at the present moment, be Governor of Newgate, and not a wretched fugitive hunted from one part of the country to the other!"

"I don't know that, nor you either! But what has occurred to vex you lately?"

"Everything!"

"Well, Noakes, just pay attention to me for a few minutes."

"Say on!"

"What is past and done cannot be undone—you admit that, don't you?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, then, we are companions, and I don't choose that we should separate. Instead of cursing the past

would it not be better for you to consider what will be the best thing to do in the future?"

Mr. Noakes was literally astounded to hear Jonathan Wild speaking in such a reasonable strain.

He looked at him incredulously, being at first unable to believe that so great a change had taken place in him.

His next thought was, that Jonathan had some deep-laid scheme in his brain, and this was but the commencement of the unwinding of its convolutions.

From what is known of the man, the reader will admit that this was a very reasonable supposition.

With something between real and assumed indifference, Noakes replied, with a half-offended air:

"I have tried that, Mr. Wild, and found it useless,—you are deaf to the voice of reason."

"I have been."

"And are you not now?"

"No."

Mr. Noakes could hardly credit the evidence of his senses.

"Did I not tell you," continued Wild, "a little while ago that I should consider of what you had said?"

"You did."

"Well, then, I have considered."

"And with what result?"

"That you are in the right. I can see it now that I have suffered myself to be led away by my rage and by my strong desire for revenge."

"Then—then," said Noakes, hesitatingly—"do you really contemplate leaving England?"

"I do."

"But when?"

"As soon as it is possible to do so."

"Then turn your horse's head in the direction of the sea-coast," cried Noakes, "and in a few hours we shall be safe from pursuit."

"Not quite—you forget that there are several little obstacles in the way which must first be surmounted."

"What are they?"

"The chief is money—how much have you about you?"

"None."

"And I have only a little more, so that, you see, before your intention can be carried out, gold must be obtained from somewhere."

Mr. Noakes sighed.

"It will end in our destruction," he said. "I can see that plain enough."

"But we will be careful, Noakes. Do you overlook the fact that we must have money to pay our passage when we get on board ship?"

"True, I had forgotten that."

"And no wonder,—you fixed your attention upon one point, and one point alone, never thinking of the difficulties you may have to encounter in reaching it."

Noakes felt that there was truth in this.

"I am inclined to reason with you to-night," said Jonathan, though, as may be supposed, he had a motive for this change in his tactics.

"I am glad to hear it," said Noakes, "and I hope some conclusion will be arrived at—for me, this life is worse than any death could be."

"I think we have arrived at a conclusion," replied Wild,—"it is, to leave England for some other land. All that we have to do is, decide upon the means of carrying out our intention."

"True."

"Money, you grant, is absolutely necessary. Well, then, I will consent to forego all my schemes of vengeance, and direct the whole of my attention to obtaining the sum we require."

"And when you have obtained it—"

"We will set sail."

"Mr. Wild."

"What?"

"In time back, when our positions were different, I heard many strange rumours concerning yourself."

"No doubt."

"Among them there was one which seemed at least to have common sense for its foundation."

"What was that?"

"It was reported on all sides that you had concealed in various places a large amount of money. The general impression was that it was buried in various parts of the

country, in small sums, and that you alone knew the secret of their situation."

Wild laughed.

"There was foundation for that report," he replied, "though how the fact got abroad I can't tell."

"Everyone believed it," continued Noakes, "especially those who had the least idea of the amount of business you transacted."

"And so you believed it?"

"I did, and believe it still."

Jonathan laughed again.

"Now," continued Noakes, "if you are sincere in what you say, disclose where the money is buried. Let us go and obtain it; we shall then have sufficient to answer every purpose."

"Noakes."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"I am, in a manner of speaking, forced to say it, but you are a clever man—a very clever man indeed!"

"As how, Mr. Wild—as how?"

"Well, then, I confess that the money I made by my trade I buried in several places, in small sums."

"You did?"

"I really did."

"Then—"

"Stay—don't get so excited! The worst of your cleverness is, you always contrive to overlook something. Now, in the present matter you have overlooked a serious point."

"What is that?"

"Did you never consider that I might at some time or other have unburied this treasure myself, and disposed of it elsewhere?"

Mr. Noakes looked blank.

"But you have not done so—you are only telling me this to deceive me."

"You can be of that way of thinking if you like," said Jonathan, grinding his teeth savagely; "but I can assure you it is the truth, nevertheless. Curses on my folly—I wish I had left it where it was!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just this,—when the report got wind that my money was buried, I thought there would be many people on the search. I imagined, too, that all my movements would be closely watched."

"Yes—yes!"

"Therefore, I decided that it would be unsafe to let the treasure remain buried any longer; and so, using great care, I went at irregular intervals to the various places, and on each occasion dug up a portion and transferred it to my pockets."

"Well, what did you do with it then?"

"Like a fool, I placed it in a bank. I imagined that was a profound secret. I did not deposit it in my own name, but in one formed by a transposition of the letters in Jonathan Wild. By degrees I kept adding fresh deposits to the amount, until at length the whole reached a sum little short of twenty-six thousand pounds!"

Mr. Noakes gasped for breath.

"And—and—that money," he said—"what became of it?"

"It was stolen from me," said Wild, in an angry tone—"stolen from me by one who ever acted a traitor's part towards me!"

"Who was that?"

"How he became possessed of the knowledge of the secret," continued Wild, without heeding the question, "I know not, and events proved that he did obtain the knowledge. While I was in prison in Newgate, my son, George Wild, went to the bank, and, forging my feigned name, drew out the whole amount; and from that moment to this I have neither seen nor heard of him!"

Mr. Noakes was quite overcome by the bare mention of such a sum of money.

"And he took it all?" he asked.

"All but a mere trifle,—nothing worth mentioning. Curses on him! But the time will come, I hope, when we shall meet again, and then I will make him bitterly rue the hour! He has been a curse to me from the very first; but he shall suffer for all! No arguments—no entreaties—nothing shall cause me to overlook this last act!"

"Did he not once serve you the same trick before?" asked Noakes.

"He did; and when he returned I overlooked it, and forgave him for it. He nearly ruined me then, but I recovered my position. When he came back he promised to aid me in all my plans. I knew what a useful ally he would be, and so, you see, I forgave him."

"And," asked Mr. Noakes, "was that the whole amount you possessed?"

"Every guinea."

"Challenge your memory, Mr. Wild—think again. In burying so many different sums of money in so many different places, is it not possible you may have forgotten one?"

"No—that is a false hope. I kept a careful record in a book of every one, and took especial care to visit all."

"And you have no more money?"

"Not any, Noakes; so abandon that thought at once. Money, however, we must have, whether we remain in England or whether we quit it. Assist me to obtain some, and I will go."

"A little will suffice," said Noakes, after a pause. "We might sell our horses—they would fetch something."

"No doubt. But, then, there's something else to be borne in mind. When we get to a foreign country we must exist. I am not the man to settle down at my time of life into a mere working machine. Before I leave these shores, I must obtain money enough to live upon—at any rate, for some years to come. It is no use attempting to go abroad without money in your pockets."

"Then," said Noakes, "it appears to me the prospect of going away is, after all, as far off as ever."

"Not so—not so; for I am more sick of this life than you imagine. But I have a plan."

"What is it?"

"We must put our heads together, Noakes, and devise some excellent scheme by which we can obtain all the money we require at one stroke; then we will depart. You see that is reducing the risk materially."

"But where is such an amount to be obtained?"

"That I cannot take upon myself to say at this moment. It will require much consideration. A rash resolve might prove fatal to both of us. May I hope that there is a better understanding now between us?"

"There is, Mr. Wild,—here's my hand upon it. I am only anxious that you should consider the future—not wholly disregard it."

"Well, you see what I am disposed to do now."

"Yes, and I am quite content, for you may depend, should either of us be taken prisoner, such a close watch will be kept upon our persons that escape will be utterly out of the question."

"Very true—very true."

And Jonathan Wild shuddered, for just at that moment he happened to remember the prediction which had twice been uttered by the old hag.

CHAPTER DC.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD RE-CROSS THE RIVER AND CONTINUE THEIR SEARCH FOR JONATHAN WILD.

LEAVING Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes journeying along the highway, we will return to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, and relate what befel them after crossing the river.

The officers quite made a mistake in their calculations when they imagined the fugitives would remain anywhere about that spot.

No sooner had they landed and shaken the moisture from their apparel than Blueskin exclaimed:

"Now, Jack, forward—forward! We must not lose a second—every moment is of the utmost importance to us!"

"I know that!" said Jack. "But which way are you going now?"

"Straight on at present. Let us follow the course of the stream—we can debate as we go along!"

This was done.

Looking back, Blueskin observed the officers ride off, and instantly divined what was their intention.

"They are going to ride over the bridge, and think to get at us by going round that way. We shall beat them, I feel assured. On—on!"

"Suppose," said Jack, "we were to ride a little further and then swim across the river again; there does not seem to be so very much risk in it, and ten to one if we

should not by that means throw the officers off the scent altogether."

"A good thought, Jack; we will carry it out!"

"Now?"

"No, not just at present. Let us push on, and wait long enough to be certain that the officers are out of sight."

"I think we are better on that side of the river than this," continued Jack.

"Why?"

"Because I feel convinced we are on Jonathan Wild's right track. If it had not been for the officers we might probably, by this time, have discovered him. At any rate, he would be on the other side of the stream, and so we must make our way back there."

"I quite agree with you, Jack. Depend upon it, no one else could be guilty of such a crime."

In this supposition Blueskin and Jack were both mistaken.

Jonathan Wild had not committed the murders in the post-chaise, therefore they were misled.

They had got upon a false scent, and unfortunately they had no suspicion such was the case.

Of course, all was owing to the false information they had received at the first.

Even if they did overtake Jonathan Wild, and even if they captured him, what a disappointment it would be to find that he had no hand in the poor girl's abduction.

At present this event was not likely to occur, for at that time Jonathan Wild was very many miles away from them in the interior of the country.

Both considered the project of recrossing the river a good one; and now, having gone, as they believed, a sufficient distance, they determined to make the attempt.

The river was very much broader at this point, but to counterbalance this disadvantage was the fact that the current was by no means so rapid.

Therefore, with little difficulty they were able to cross almost in a straight line.

Immediately upon landing they pushed on, being exceedingly anxious to overtake their ancient enemy.

Gaining presently an elevated piece of ground, they paused, and looked around them.

Far away in the distance, they could perceive a number of small moving objects.

They knew in a moment what they were.

They were the heads of the police officers which were just visible above the tops of the hedgerows as they galloped along.

But though they looked far and wide, they could neither see anything of Jonathan Wild nor any token of his presence.

Again Jack's heart sank.

In a saddened voice, he exclaimed:

"It's all over, Blueskin—all over! Think of the length of time she has already been in his power, and here we are no nearer to discovering her than we were at first."

"We cannot say that," replied Blueskin. "For my own part, I believe we are much nearer. You must continue to hope on—keep up your spirits. Nothing will be gained by despondency."

"But I can't help feeling despondent. In this affair, Fate seems set against us altogether!"

"It does, indeed; but do not linger here, Jack. Some of those officers may perceive us in the distance, then we shall have them on our track again. Forward!—forward! Surely we shall learn something ere long!"

After some discussion, it was resolved that they should return to the high-road, and gallop along it, looking closely on all sides for some traces of their enemy.

Under all the circumstances, this was really the most reasonable thing they could attempt.

A gallop of a few minutes brought them to the main road; and, after glancing behind them to ascertain that none of their foes were near, they set forward, Blueskin with renewed hope in his heart.

It was indeed a most disheartening circumstance for them that Edgworth Bess should have disappeared just at the moment she had.

They believed they had succeeded in overcoming all their difficulties, and, in fact, had it not been for this unlucky event, she would doubtless have been in a fair way of recovering her possessions.

Now the prospect seemed distant enough.

Miles and miles were travelled, still without the least sign presenting itself.

They did not dare to make any inquiries, but had to trust entirely to their eyesight to guide them.

The reader scarcely needs to be told that they were unsuccessful in making any discovery.

But as time passed on, Jack's horse began to show symptoms of intense distress. Probably it had received some serious injury in consequence of the stone having lodged in its foot.

At any rate, it was now completely knocked up, and it was no longer possible for them to continue on their way at anything like a rapid rate.

Every mile, indeed, the poor animal seemed to grow more and more exhausted.

Blueskin's, however, held up bravely.

It was evidently a superior horse altogether to Jack's.

This circumstance caused them not a little dismay, as speed was of such vital importance to them.

"Something must be done, Jack," said Blueskin; "it will not do to go on like this."

"There is only one thing can be done that I can think of."

"What is that?"

"To obtain another horse."

"I fear that will be impossible."

"Why so?"

"Because we have not money enough to purchase another."

"We must have one by some means—the enterprise cannot fail from that."

"But if we steal one there will probably be a line and cry raised about, and then we shall find ourselves involved in fresh difficulties."

"I don't see how we are to avoid it."

"We must think—we must think."

A silence of several minutes' duration took place, but even during those few minutes Jack could perceive a perceptible difference in the rate of speed made by his horse.

"We shall come to a stop soon," he at length ejaculated—"it's a sorry jade. That man has deceived us."

"I don't know that," replied Blueskin; "few ordinary horses could stand against such continued and violent exertion."

"I must have another, that's certain," said Jack, positively. "Now, for instance, what a satisfaction it would be if I could meet with some one on the road, and persuade him to exchange."

Blueskin laughed.

"That's droll," he said; "in fact, quite like one of your old ideas."

"Such a thing might be done."

"But you would have to offer some very powerful inducement."

"That remains to be seen; however, another mile, and you will see my horse ready to lie down by the roadside."

"Hark!" exclaimed Blueskin. "I can hear some one coming. Listen!"

Jack did so.

The regular beat of a horse's hoofs could then be heard.

"Yes," he said—"some one is travelling our way, and by the sound, I take it he is mounted on a capital nag."

"Could you persuade him to exchange, Jack?"

"I don't know. I might, perhaps."

"Should you mind trying?"

"Not at all."

"Well, then, do so."

"I will. Ride on, Blueskin, and leave me behind. Don't go altogether out of sight, but just watch my proceedings. I may require your assistance."

"All right!—I wish you luck; but if, by fair means, you can persuade that traveller to give up his horse, it is very strange indeed to me."

"Watch the result," said Jack. "Ride forward at your best speed—I will follow slowly, so that the traveller will quickly overtake me."

Blueskin obeyed without another word.

He had every confidence in Jack's cleverness.

In past times he had seen many instances of it, and he quite believed his companion clever enough to obtain what he required by some skilful stratagem.

Jack Sheppard remained stationary for some time, watching his companion as he receded in the distance.

Then, finding the traveller was not very far behind him, he set his own steed in motion.

The few minutes' rest produced a beneficial effect upon the creature, for now it set forward at much better speed than before.

On came the traveller very much more rapidly.

Once Jack Sheppard ventured to glance back over his shoulder.

He caught sight of the traveller, who appeared to be a cavalry officer in undress uniform.

To the rider Jack paid but little attention, he had eyes only for his steed.

His heart quite gave a bound when he found what a glorious creature it was.

Even in the distance he could perceive that its action was superb.

At present, however, he had thought of no plan, nor, indeed, did he trouble himself much to do so, but preferred to rely more upon chance, and upon seizing upon some occurrence and turning it to his advantage.

He quickly discovered one favourable circumstance.

When the traveller was only a few yards in the rear, Jack pulled up.

He was at the foot of a rather steep hill, and he allowed his horse to ascend it at a walk.

He made a calculation in his own mind that the officer, if such he was, would probably do the very same thing.

As a great deal depended upon this, Jack watched for the result with some slight amount of anxiety.

To have looked back would have appeared suspicious, so he relied wholly upon his sense of hearing.

CHAPTER DCI.

DESCRIBES THE CLEVER STRATAGEM JACK SHEPPARD MADE USE OF TO OBTAIN POSSESSION OF THE TRAVELLER'S HORSE.

He was not kept for any length of time in a state of suspense.

He was almost ready to utter a cry of delight when he heard the traveller draw in his horse, and reduce his speed to a walk.

But even although their paces were the same, such was the superiority of the traveller's horse that he quickly gained upon Jack Sheppard.

When only a little distance separated from the officer, Jack turned in the saddle and made a bow.

"Good day, sir," he said, in a pleasant, off-handed way, and just in the manner that travellers were in the habit of accosting each other in those days.

Jack found his supposition regarding the stranger was a correct one.

He was a cavalry officer in undress uniform.

In a pleasant tone of voice he returned the salutation.

In those days when travelling was such a widely-different thing to what it is now, perfect strangers frequently fell into conversation on the highway.

When they met with an agreeable companion it was pleasant enough, and, moreover, many found it an advantage, for it was much safer than travelling alone.

Three more steps placed the officer abreast of Jack, who immediately exclaimed, in a voice of the greatest enthusiasm:

"That's a magnificent creature, sir, upon my word—a most magnificent creature! I never in my life saw an equal to it!" And Jack looked at the horse in real and unaffected admiration.

No man who owns a horse can be insensible to a compliment paid to it,—in fact, it is a weak point; therefore, the stranger, making a half bow, replied:

"It is a fine animal, certainly—the best I ever had beneath me."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Jack; "it's everything, so far as appearance goes."

"And in everything else."

"Then you have a treasure indeed," added Jack. "Now, look at my horse. Tell me what you think of it."

The officer stroked his chin.

"I am a blunt man," he said. "You have given me your candid opinion of my horse, haven't you?"

"I have."

"But perhaps if I was to give you my candid opinion of yours, you would be offended."



[JACK SHEPPARD ASTONISHES THE CAVALRY OFFICER.]

"Oh, not at all—not at all!"

"Well, then, to speak the truth, I must say it is the sorriest-looking jade that I have set eyes on since I left London this morning.

"Just so," said Jack, as though he fully anticipated such a reply—"that's what everybody says. That's the only drawback my horse has."

"The only drawback?" said the officer, puzzled to understand him.

"Yes; but for that he would be perfect."

The officer laughed.

"You are inclined to be merry," he said.

"No, not at all. I tell you, the only thing that can be urged against my horse is, that he is not good-looking—in fact, he is decidedly bad-looking."

"I quite agree with you there."

"But," continued Jack, "for everything else he is invaluable, whether it is at a walk or a trot, a canter or a gallop—he excels all that ever I have tried him with; but

if he can surpass himself in any one thing it is in leaping. Ah! sir, I should like you to see him leap!"

The officer looked as though he would have liked very much to see it, for Jack's horse at that time was in such a jaded state that it was hardly able to put one leg before the other.

"Of course," he said, addressing Jack, "I may believe just what I think proper—you would not force me to take all you say for gospel?"

"No, no—I'd scorn to coerce anyone; but there's a way of removing all doubts."

"And what's that, pray?"

"Why, ocular demonstration. Wait a little, sir—we shall get to the top of this hill presently, then I will show you what my horse can do—I promise you will be astounded."

"But do you really mean, in sober earnestness, to say that he can leap?"

"He can. You understand he is not in very good con-

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dition now, for I have travelled very many miles, and it is quite time he had a bate; nevertheless, in spite of his looks, you will see him perform with ease what many a well-bred racehorse could not accomplish."

"Indeed!" said the stranger. "You make me curious. I should indeed like to see him!"

"You shall—you shall if you will only walk with me to the top of this hill!"

"We are more than half-way up already," said the stranger. "But when you talk about your horse being able to leap, and trot, and gallop, and such like, you must not think of putting him by the side of mine."

"But I should, sir," said Jack, positively—"I should, sir! I should in every other respect but that of appearance—there, of course, I give in, for I grant your horse is handsomer in every way than mine; but handsomer is as handsomer does—that's what I always think."

"And you're quite right," said the officer. "Upon my word, I hardly know what to think of you. Surely you must be making jest at my expense."

"I beg you will disabuse yourself of any such ideas, sir. I trust you are a gentleman—I take you to be such—otherwise I should not have entered into conversation with you."

"You have not been mistaken, sir," said the officer. "I trust you will fully pardon me for what I have said; I assure you I meant no harm."

"Oh! don't say another word—pray don't say another word, I beg! It is really not worth while to tender point with me!"

"I might say the same thing," replied the stranger. "I should never have thought of laying out any money on him, I can assure you, if I had not witnessed his performances."

"And I will warrant when you see him you will be ready to bet any money on him."

The officer shook his head doubtfully.

"I can see you are still incredulous," continued Jack, "but I will convince you ere long; a minute or two more, and we shall be at the top of the hill. I shall want you to allow him a minute or two for breathing time—nothing more."

"Oh! all right; and in the meanwhile I will show you what my horse can do, and that will surprise you, I rather fancy."

"Now I come to look at his points," said Jack, "he's a noble animal, scarcely to be matched, I should think. I suppose no money would tempt you to part with him?"

"Oh, I don't know that—I never set much store on horseflesh; in fact, I think it unlucky to keep one after you have once been offered money for him."

"Indeed! Well, now, just for curiosity's sake, tell me what you would take for him? Don't dream, however, for a moment that I wish to purchase, for nothing would induce me to part with the one I have."

"You surprise and amaze me," replied the officer; "but if you wish me to name the price I will do so."

"Pray do then!"

"Well, a hundred and fifty guineas is the very lowest price I would take for him."

"Is that all?"

"All?" said the officer. "Pretty well, I think, for one bit of horseflesh that might be injured and turn out worth nothing at all to-morrow."

"You surprise me!" said Jack. "I should have valued him at double the money. I know this, three hundred guineas would not tempt me to part with my sorry jade, as you call him."

"I hope you do not take any offence at my expression?"

"Oh! none at all—none at all! It has been said by many before to-day, and I am quite used to it. Very likely I should have said the same myself, but ever since I have had this horse I have been fully sensible of the value of good looks."

It was just at this moment that the summit of the hill was reached.

They paused, according to agreement.

"Now," said the officer, who was a little piqued by the way in which Jack had spoken, "while your horse is recovering his wind, I will show you something according to promise."

"I shall be very happy, sir," returned Jack.

"Well, then, do you see that gate?"

"I do."

"It is a five-barred one."

"So I perceive."

"And not only that," continued the officer; "do you perceive how some one has been at the pains to twist all that hawthorn into it so as to prevent people from climbing over?"

"Of course I do; that makes it more than equal to another bar in height."

"Precisely—that is what I wanted you to admit. Now you will see that, with the greatest of ease, my horse will jump clear over, and his hoofs shall not touch the highest twig."

"Then," said Jack, with an air of delight and interest, "if he can do that he's worth a thousand guineas at the least!"

"Well, sir, you shall see—pray observe!"

"I am all attention."

The stranger backed his horse as far as he could from the gate, then, releasing the rein, he just pricked him with the spur.

He bounded forward like a greyhound.

In good earnest, Jack was interested in this experiment.

He scarcely thought the horse capable of performing such a feat.

To his astonishment and delight, the noble creature leaped clear over the obstacle, and alighted in perfect safety on the other side.

"At all risks," he muttered, between his teeth, "that horse shall be mine!"

The stranger reined-up in the meadow, and, turning his horse's head towards the gate again, made him leap over it, and he alighted in the road.

"Wonderful!" said Jack, with the air of one entirely overcome with astonishment—"truly wonderful! I could never have believed it if I had not seen it myself!"

"Pooh! that is nothing," said the stranger, patting his horse's neck, proudly—"that is nothing! But I should very much like to know whether your horse that you set so much store by could do it."

"This is hardly a time to make a fair trial," said Jack, "but I have no doubt he could—that is, under one circumstance only."

"And pray what may that be?"

"That I sit in the saddle myself."

"Can that possibly make any difference?"

"Oh, yes; every difference! Now, for instance, if I were to alight and you were to get upon his back, neither caresses nor blows could force him to leap."

"That's more astonishing still!" said the stranger.

"But pray tell me, am I right in understanding that if you ride on his back he would jump it?"

"Just as easily as yours," said Jack, positively.

"I am still incredulous; but it is an extraordinary animal if it will only jump with one rider."

"I have often known it to be the case," said Jack, "and I should not wonder if yours is the same."

"Pooh—nonsense!"

"Is anyone else in the habit of riding him besides yourself?"

"No—no one."

"Well, then, I will bet you a couple of bottles of wine that your horse would not leap over that gate with a stranger in the saddle."

"Done!" said the officer. "I'd bet you a hundred if you wished it!"

"No, no—let the bet be an even one!"

"But it is not fair," said the officer—"not at all fair!"

"Why not?"

"I am sure of winning!"

"I am of a different opinion," said Jack, "and if you like, we will put the bet in this way: that your horse will be unable, or rather unwilling, to leap over that gate with me on his back."

"Done!" said the officer again. "That's quite fair and straightforward."

As he spoke he alighted.

Jack did the same.

"Perhaps," said the latter, "you will be kind enough to pay particular attention to my horse for a moment?"

"Oh, certainly—certainly! You are a good rider," added the officer, as Jack sprang on to the back of the other horse.

"Yes, I have been in continual practice, in fact, as long

as I can remember. There's nothing like beginning to learn to ride when you are young."

"True—true! But, sir?"

"What?"

"Look upon your two bottles of wine as lost. I can tell by the look of my horse that he will go over the gate like a feather. You don't weigh half so much as I do, so I am sure he will carry you easily!"

"Well, you know my opinion," said Jack. "For your horse, of course, I cannot answer, though I can for my own."

As he spoke, he backed his horse in the same way as the officer had done, and touched him smartly with the spur.

He gave three bounds, and then went clear over the gate, leaving a good six inches to spare.

"Aha—capital!" roared the officer. "You've lost—you've lost! I knew you would! Gad, it's capital!"

CHAPTER DCIII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN AT LENGTH OBTAIN TIDINGS OF JONATHAN WILD.

THE cavalry officer laughed immoderately.

He was delighted to think he had won his bet so easily.

Not for one moment did he dream such a cruel trick had been played upon him.

Now, when Jack had jumped over the gate, nothing would have been easier or more simple than to have galloped off at full speed across the meadows.

But that natural love for fun and frolic which had been such a characteristic in his early career sprang up again with irrepressible force.

The adventure should not end here, he was determined on that.

Therefore, with the greatest imaginable coolness, he stopped his horse, turned him round, and again made him face the gate.

As before, the noble creature cleared the obstacle easily.

"Aha!" cried the officer, full of exultation—"I told you how it would be! You've lost—you've lost!"

Jack pulled up, but did not attempt to dismount.

"My dear friend!" he cried, in an offhand tone. "I beg your pardon, though perhaps you'll excuse me for calling you by such a familiar title?"

"Oh, certainly—certainly! What need is there for any ceremony between us?"

"None whatever, in my opinion," replied Jack, "and I am glad you think the same. I think it is a pity for friends to act too much upon ceremony."

"But you have lost the bet, have you not?"

"I have."

"That's all right, then."

"But you must remember that you have something to do. Just put my horse to the gate, and the result will surprise you!"

"No, I would rather you try him first," said the officer.

"As you like; but I was going to observe a minute or two ago—"

"What—what?"

"That however delightful it may be to meet with a friend on the highway, you ought to be upon your guard in forming acquaintanceship with strangers."

The officer looked at him doubtfully.

"You should also beware," said Jack, as he gathered the reins in his hands, "how you permit another person to mount your horse."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this—he might be so fond of the animal as to feel disinclined to dismount."

"But that's absurd!" said the officer, going a step nearer, as though a suspicion of the truth had entered his mind.

"Not at all—not at all!" said Jack. "In the present case, although I set such a great store by my own horse, I prefer yours. You cannot grumble at the exchange, I am sure, so good-bye! I have the honour of wishing you a very good morning!"

With these words on his lips, Jack Sheppard touched the horse sharply with the spur, and away he went down the road at a most prodigious speed.

Quite a minute elapsed before the officer moved.

He was dumbfounded with astonishment, and stood gazing after the retreating form of his steed.

It was not until Jack disappeared amid a cloud of dust that he recovered the use of his faculties.

The first thing he did was to utter a string of most awful imprecations, such as no one would have expected to come from the lips of such a gentlemanly personage.

Then, furious with rage, he mounted Jack's horse, upon which so many premises had been lavished.

It was in vain, however, that he used both whip and spur with the greatest briskness; the tired-out, jaded beast was insensible to both, and could only be got to move at a sluggish pace.

The idea of attempting any pursuit of his own horse was simply ridiculous, and, to his great chagrin, the officer had to abandon the attempt.

With him, however, we have nothing further to do. We must return to Jack Sheppard, and give an account of his proceedings.

At the rate he went, he overtook Blueskin in a very few minutes.

The latter, accustomed as he was to Jack's exploits, could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyesight.

It seemed such an outrageous and impossible thing to induce a man to exchange a good horse for a bad one.

Yet, it had evidently been done, for the road had an upward tendency, so that when they reined-in their steeds they were able to see for a considerable distance behind them.

Blueskin turned his head, and looked over the hedge.

There was the officer, sure enough, whipping Jack's horse in a furious manner, but failing to make much progress.

In a few words, Jack explained the means he had adopted to bring about this result.

His companion could not help laughing heartily.

"You are a genius, Jack—you are; there's no mistake about that—a regular genius!"

Jack laughed too.

But soon a shade of uneasiness came over his countenance, for at all once he remembered the object they had in view.

It was only necessary for him to think of Edgworth Bess, and then his feelings underwent a total alteration.

"No success as yet," he said—"no success at all, Blueskin! What shall be our next step?"

"I think it would be wise to rest awhile."

"No, no—I can't rest!"

"I do not speak particularly on our accounts," said Blueskin, "though I confess I am weary enough myself!"

"And so am I."

"Then let us halt at the first quiet inn we come to."

"Shall we be known?"

"I think there will be but little fear of that."

"Well, then, if you think it will be for the best, I consent."

"Why, you must remember that Jonathan Wild would not go far with his prisoner without coming to a halt."

"I see."

"We may be lucky enough to hit upon the identical inn. If so, we shall obtain important information; at any rate, there is a chance of learning something, if we only make our inquiries carefully."

"Then I am willing," said Jack—"quite willing, for I am sick and faint for want of food."

This understanding having been arrived at, the two friends rode at a rapid rate along the highway.

As before, they continued to keep a sharp look-out on all sides of them, but, as before, without meeting with any result.

At last they turned into a cross-country road, and, proceeding some distance along it, came to a roadside public-house.

The place was private and retired, so, after a brief deliberation, they resolved to put up for a short time.

An ostler made his appearance the moment they stopped in front of the inn.

Our friends caught sight of him, and no sooner had they done so than they fixed their eyes upon him, being filled with the greatest curiosity.

The man's face had evidently been seriously injured, and his face was crossed and re-crossed in every direction by numerous pieces of sticking-plaster.

This gave him a most hideous and grotesque look.

The plaster was very dirty, as though it had been on for a length of time.

There was every indication indeed that his face was rapidly getting well, and this circumstance made Blueskin and Jack aware of how serious the injury must have been in the first instance.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "what do you want?"

"To put up for an hour or so," said Jack, "if you can accommodate us."

"Oh yes—never fear for that, sir!"

He hastened forward and took hold of the horses by the bridle while both alighted.

"Walk straight in, gentlemen," he said, "through the front door yonder. You'll find them all inside. I'll attend to your horses well, never fear!"

"Do," said Blueskin; "it will be nothing out of your pocket, depend upon that!"

The man touched his forehead, and the two friends hastened towards the inn.

As soon as they had crossed the threshold they were accosted by an individual who appeared to be the landlord.

He greeted them with a profusion of bows, and behaved in a most obsequious manner.

It was not often that two such guests stopped at his house.

"Would you like a private room, gentlemen? I have one,—every accommodation."

"Yes," replied Blueskin, "a private room, by all means!"

"This way, then, if you please."

The landlord ushered them into a scantily-furnished room, upon the door of which was painted in white letters the word "Private."

"We have travelled far," said Blueskin; "and our appetites are keen. Get us a good, substantial meal—the best you can procure quickly—and some of your old ale."

"All right, gentlemen; I will see to it in a moment—no time shall be lost."

With all possible despatch a meal was speedily upon the table, and the landlord remained in the room, in order to wait upon his guests.

Like most of his race, he was chatty and communicative.

Blueskin was anxious to draw him into conversation, and had no difficulty whatever in doing so.

"Has anything particular happened lately?" he inquired, by way of commencing a conversation.

"Nothing very important lately, sir, for, you see, this is a quiet, out-of-the-way place."

"Yes, I know that—there doesn't seem to be another habitation for miles."

"There is not, sir—there is not; and it's a house of little trade, I can assure you. We have few chance customers, such as you might be, gentlemen; and if it was not for the people who stay here on market day we should be very badly off indeed."

"Well, now, if things are so quiet," said Blueskin, "what might be the most important event that has happened lately?"

The landlord scratched his head.

"I can hardly tell you that—it has been so long since anything important did happen. Yet, stay—I have just thought—"

"Of what?"

"Why, of the ostler. Somehow or other, that fact quite escaped my recollection."

"What might that be?"

"I will tell you, gentlemen, all about it. It's a very singular affair—a very singular affair indeed!"

Jack and Blueskin waited for him to proceed.

"You saw how his face was bandaged up?"

"Yes, and thought at the time, how seriously he must have been injured."

"You are right—he was seriously injured. I wonder he was not killed upon the spot!"

"And is that the singular circumstance?"

"It is. You will admit that when you hear it. Pray listen!"

"We are listening."

"Well, then, gentlemen, some short time back two travellers pulled up in front of the inn, just by the horse-trough yonder, and just as you might have pulled up to-day."

"Well?"

"But it was not well, as you'll hear very quickly. Joe, the ostler, went up to them, just as he might have gone up to you when you arrived, and he asked these travellers whether they intended to stop, just as he might have asked you."

"He did so," said Jack, losing patience. "But never mind that part of it. Go on!"

"Well, gentlemen, to make a long story short, these two travellers declined to alight, but asked for ale to be brought them for them to drink while their horses were having a little hay and water."

"And what sort of looking men were they?"

"Well, rather disagreeable and disreputable—not at all the kind of men you would like to meet with on a dark night in a lonely place. That was what Joe the ostler thought, and so he looked at them very intently. One of them he felt sure he recognised. He had seen him more than once before, and although he was greatly altered, yet he was sure he was not mistaken."

"He recognised one of them, you say?"

"Yes."

"And who was that one?"

"Can you guess?"

"No."

"Then you never would, gentlemen. He was no other than—than—"

"Who?"

"Jonathan Wild!"

CHAPTER DCIII.

THE LANDLORD CONCLUDES HIS NARRATIVE, AND JACK AND BLUESKIN DISCOVER THEIR ERROR.

BOTH Jack and Blueskin started, for this announcement rather took them by surprise.

Nothing that the landlord had said previously was calculated to make them suspect it.

"You seem astonished, gentlemen, and well you may; but I can assure you that it was no other than that daring villain!"

"You do surprise us!" said Blueskin. "I did not know he had been in this part of the country!"

"Oh yes, sir—I have heard of him since, not far from here!"

"But," inquired Blueskin, eagerly, "if the ostler recognised him, what was the result?"

"Why, he got his face smashed for his pains!"

"How was that?"

"We imagine that Jonathan Wild guessed what was passing in his mind—so, suddenly and without any preparation, he dashed a quart jug, out of which he had been drinking, full into the ostler's face, and then rode off, followed by his companion."

Jack and Blueskin were greatly excited.

"And what followed," they asked—"what followed?"

"Wait a moment, gentlemen, and I'll tell you. I heard the news, and ran out, wondering what could be the matter; there was Joe just getting up off the ground, with his face covered with blood. I could scarcely get an explanation from him, he was so excited. He ran into the stable, mounted a horse, and rode off barebacked, with nothing to guide the animal but a halter!"

"But Jonathan Wild escaped?"

"Well, yes—he did. But not long after Joe had disappeared we heard some more travellers coming; and when they came in sight, they turned out to be police officers. They no sooner heard that Jonathan had passed that way than they clapped spurs to their steeds and went off at a prodigious rate. In a little while they overtook Joe, for when he heard they were behind him he pulled up and waited. He led the way, and they managed to get in sight of the two villains."

"But if they escaped," said Blueskin, "we do not much care about hearing the rest."

The landlord looked at them in surprise.

"I can tell you the remainder in half a dozen words."

"Do so, then."

"Joe soon found that the officers were not so well mounted as he was, and so he urged his own horse to the utmost. He had pistols, and presently came close enough to use them. He fired, and, as he found afterwards, his shot took effect; but just then, unluckily for him, his horse got his legs entangled in the rope attached to the halter, for in his excitement Joe let go of it. Down went the horse with a crash, throwing Joe upon his head, and there he lay insensible. He was brought back here, and we thought at first he would never recover. You see he's getting better rapidly; and he declares as he did from the first, that he shall yet live to see Jonathan Wild dangling from Tyburn Tree!"

"I hope he may!" said Jack, between his teeth. "But who was he wounded?"

"We learned afterwards from the officers that it was Wild's companion, Mr. Noakes, once governor of Newgate."

"Indeed! But he was not killed, I suppose?"

"Oh no! The officers continued their pursuit, and had some more adventures with the villains in a wood, where they discovered a gang of coiners; but Wild and Noakes again escaped, and since then I have not heard anything about them."

"But this must be some time ago," said Blueskin.

"It is."

"How long?"

"I can't say with any degree of certainty—several weeks."

"And you have not seen Wild since?"

"No."

"Nor heard anything of him?"

"Nothing at all. But excuse me, gentlemen, you seem to be deeply interested in all these particulars!"

"We are. We have reasons of our own for being so; and you must excuse us if we keep them to ourselves."

This was all the information they were able to obtain from this quarter.

Previous to leaving, however, they got into conversation with the ostler, who described to them the exact position of the wood in which the coiners had been discovered.

The two friends then rode off.

But the intelligence they had received so far from bringing them any satisfaction, only made them feel disappointed and anxious.

It seemed pretty clear that they were not upon Wild's track.

If he had gone that way he would surely have been seen by some of the people frequenting the inn.

Moreover, they concluded that after such a series of adventures and escapes, Jonathan Wild would be by far too prudent to venture in that part of the country again.

"Jack," exclaimed Blueskin, at last, "I am afraid we are on the wrong track!"

"I fear so, too. We must have been misled in the first instance. I believe that the watchman led us astray."

"But don't you think that Jonathan carried her off?"

"I can't think of anyone else who would be likely to do such a thing, or who would attempt it."

"Nor I. And yet—"

"Yet what?"

"It seems to me that he must have as much as ever he could do to keep out of the clutches of the officers; the pursuit after him has been hot and close—we have every evidence of that."

"You are right."

"Well, then, do you think it at all likely he would venture back to London, and to a quarter of it, too, where he is so well known?"

"It hardly seems likely; but you know what a character he had for daring in his desperation—who can say what he might or might not attempt?"

"No one; and besides, if Jonathan has not carried her off, who has?"

"That's the difficulty! Yet stay—we should have thought of him before—there is one we have forgotten!"

"Who—who?"

"That desperate and atrocious villain, Wild's son—he may have done this!"

"You are right! Depend upon it, it's his work and no one else's. We should have thought of him before—there

would be no obstacle in the way of his carrying her off; there has been no pursuit after him."

"Yes—yes. I feel quite sure that it is not Jonathan Wild who has carried her away, but Jonathan Wild's son."

The more Blueskin and Jack Sheppard considered upon this point, the more convinced, if possible, they became that they had at last discovered the perpetrator of this deed.

But their anxiety on the poor girl's behalf was, if possible, greater than it had been before.

Of the two, George Wild was more to be dreaded than even his rascally parent.

At his hands they were well aware Edgworth Bess would receive no mercy.

Neither supplication nor resistance would avail her in the least.

They now occupied themselves with considering what would be their best mode of proceeding.

"For the present," said Blueskin, "we cannot do better than abandon our pursuit of Jonathan Wild."

"I think so too."

"But as soon as Edgworth Bess is placed in safety, we will commence our campaign against him. We will know no rest or peace until we have brought about his capture."

"And," added Jack, "when we have seen him dangling from Tyburn Tree, then, and not till then, shall I feel content."

"Well, then," said Blueskin, "how shall we commence our operations?"

"I know not."

"But we must think—we must try and come to some conclusion as to the point from which we shall commence to make our inquiries. It is unfortunate that we are not able to make our inquiries as many others would. For our own sakes we are compelled to make use of so much caution, and we dare not on any account make ourselves known."

"In my opinion," said Jack, "we cannot do anything else than inquire of all the people we meet that it may be prudent to get into conversation with."

"Perhaps so; you see how successful we have been in this last instance."

"You mean with the landlord?"

"I do. Who could have guessed that we should have learned so much important information from him?"

"I should not, certainly."

"And yet, you see, he has quite changed the current of our thoughts. Judging by this, is there not a probability that we may meet with some one else who may do us the same service?"

"Possible, but, I am afraid, not probable."

"I don't know. Look yonder."

"What can you see?"

"A waggon and a team of horses."

"Just so."

"Now, that man probably has travelled a considerable distance. He is going in the direction of London, as you see. If George Wild has passed him with Edgworth Bess as a prisoner, we shall certainly hear of it from him. He could not fail to notice it."

"I am not so sure of that. These men often go driving along with their eyes shut."

"Let us try. If we make our inquiries carefully, no harm can come from it, and very likely a great deal of good may."

"Be it so. I have not the least objection. I am willing, indeed, to try anything at all calculated to answer the end we have in view."

This being decided upon, Jack and Blueskin rode on towards the waggon which they saw approaching.

"Good evening," said Jack, as soon as he came close to the waggon.

"Good evening, gentlemen—good evening!" was the reply. "Very happy to see you—very happy indeed!"

"How is that?" asked Jack, pausing.

The waggoner stopped his team.

"I will tell you how it is, sir," he replied. "The fact is, I'm fond of a little talk—in fact, I do think if there's one thing more delightful than another, it is to have a little talk."

"I quite agree with you," said Jack. "Especially if you can obtain an agreeable companion."

"Ah, that's it! An agreeable companion—that's everything!"

"I am exceedingly fond of a chat myself," Jack continued, determined to humour the man in this point—"in fact, that was why I said 'good evening,' though I must say it is not often that I meet with such a civil reply as you gave me."

The waggoner looked quite pleased at this compliment.

"Well, sir, I be fond of a talk—that's the truth. I think it's so uncivilised for people never to open their mouths or say a word. Don't you, sir?"

"I certainly do."

"But as I happened to remark—or, I believe, as you happened to remark first—an agreeable companion is everything in such a case."

"Certainly."

"Ah, I have just parted with a sweet one—a sweet companion, gentlemen."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and when I say just, I don't mean just exactly, for it was yesterday when I left her."

"Her?"

"Yes, her; what more agreeable companion can you have than a woman, I should like to know?"

"None—none certainly."

"Then why did you ask in that tone? making so bold."

"You're quite free to inquire," said Jack; "the reason was, I was running my head against the notion that your agreeable companion must be a man."

"Ah, sir, that's quite a mistake—the men are not half talkative enough for me—not half talkative enough."

Jack's own private opinion was, that a good listener would be best as a companion for the waggoner, for he went on at an amazing rate, as though he would like to monopolise the whole of the conversation, though what he said amounted to very little.

The mere fact of the man mentioning something about a female who was an agreeable companion sufficed to attract all their interest and curiosity.

It might be that in the end, it would turn out nothing to them, but if so, after listening patiently to what he had to tell, the waggoner would certainly answer freely any questions they might put to him concerning his adventures on the road.

CHAPTER DCIV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN AT LENGTH SUCCEED IN OBTAINING INTELLIGENCE OF THE WHEREABOUTS OF EDGORTH BESS.

"You rouse my curiosity," said Jack.

"Do I, sir?"

"Yes, you do."

"About what?"

"About that agreeable companion of yours."

"Oh, ah!"

"When you speak about her your face quite shines."

"Does it though?"

"I assure you it does, and your eyes brighten too."

"Ah, well, gentlemen, I don't wonder at that. I find I look just how I feel."

"And how is that?"

"Why, highly delighted—quite overjoyed—that's how I feel; and yet I don't know why I should, poor thing; she was in trouble enough!"

"Trouble?"

"Yes. It wasn't many words I was able to get out of her; she was half frightened to death, and sobbed and cried ever so."

Jack and Blueskin, upon hearing this, had great difficulty in controlling their excitement.

Yet they were afraid to ask any direct questions, or show that they at all suspected who the waggoner's agreeable companion was.

Had they done such a thing he would have considered it strange, would have required an explanation, and perhaps would have refused to tell them any more.

Then again there was a strong probability that they might be allowing themselves to be buoyed up by false hopes.

"I feel very anxious to know more about her," said Jack, with a beating heart; "just try and tell us straight-

forwardly from the commencement all that you know concerning her."

"I will, sir—I will with the greatest pleasure, I assure you—with the greatest pleasure!"

"Then do so."

"I will; I love to have a talk. I often think and wonder to myself what would this world be if there was no such thing as talking in it."

"Very wretched and disagreeable no doubt," said Jack, impatiently.

"I believe you. That's a subject I often ponder over as I go walking along by the side of my team. People might look at me and fancy I was thinking of nothing, but it would be a mistake. I keep trying to picture to myself what the world would be like."

"Very interesting, no doubt, but do not forget that I should like to know something more about this agreeable companion."

"Why so?"

"Oh! for nothing in particular—it is so very rarely that you see or hear of one, that I want to gather all the particulars."

"Well, gentlemen, I can assure you it's quite a curious story. Yesterday, as I was a-comin' along this very identical road, just as I might be comin' along it now, I saw a girl sitting down by the roadside."

"A girl?"

"Yes."

"What was she like?"

The man paused a minute, and said:

"Why, like a female."

"Ha, ha!" said Jack, laughing,—"that's a good joke—a very good joke, upon my word,—you're quite a wit!"

"Well, you might think so, sir, but I had no thoughts of making a joke—leastways, not then."

"Then you did not understand me."

"What did you mean, then?"

"I wanted to know whether she had a pretty face, and how she was dressed."

"Well, I didn't see her face at first, because it was covered with her hands, but I saw her dress."

"And what was that like?"

"Why, much like the same dresses that women generally wear, and she wore a round hat, like most women do too."

"And her face?"

"Well, I don't know as to its being a pretty one. I should be inclined to say it was, but others mightn't."

"Why not?"

"Because that's all a matter of fancy, as I daresay you know very well. I thought it a beautiful face, although she was crying as though her heart would break, and as though she was in very great sorrow indeed."

"Go on," said Jack, huskily—"go on. What happened next?"

"Well, I saw her in the way I said, and I thought to myself, 'Poor girl, she's on the tramp to London, and very tired she looks!'"

"And what did you do then?"

"Why, when I came up to her I stopped, and asked her if she would like to ride in the waggon."

"Did you?"

"Of course I did."

"Then, accept my thanks—my best thanks—for that kind act."

"What?" said the waggoner, opening his eyes to a prodigious width.

"Nothing—nothing."

"But what have your thanks got to do with it?"

"Nothing at all. It was a foolish remark,—I was so carried away by what you were saying."

The waggoner looked doubtful.

"Go on," said Jack, hastily—"go on. What did she say?"

"Why, she thanked me as pretty as could be, and got up in the waggon, and I was as merry as a cricket, for I thought what a comfortable ride to London I should have with some one to talk to."

"And did she talk to you?"

"Well, not so much, sir, as I could have wished; still she did talk a little, and, in spite of her sorrow, she tried to smile and be cheerful, in order to show herself grateful for what I had done, though it was little enough, goodness knows."

"Nay, nay," cried Jack—"there I disagree with you! It—it—it is the intention, not the act," he added, for in his excitement he almost betrayed himself again.

"It was a very strange affair, altogether," continued the waggoner; "for after awhile I heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and this girl I am telling you about was very much frightened. She said they were pursuers of hers, and that the consequences to herself would be fearful if they discovered her. She said, too, that she had with great difficulty escaped from them, and that they would be all the more violent in consequence."

"And you?" asked Jack—"what did you do? What happened next?"

"Well, sir, I thought it was a pity that anyone so pretty should fall into the hands of a couple of rascals, so I told her to lie down in the waggon and cover herself over with some empty sacks, which she did."

"Yes—yes. Don't continually pause in your narrative—go swiftly on to the end!"

"Why, I should think you must know her, sir," said the waggoner.

"Perhaps I do—I can't tell, though, until I have heard more. Go on—go on!"

In a very roundabout fashion the waggoner told Jack the termination of the adventure.

He related how George Wild and Nicholson came up to the waggon and questioned him; and from the description he was able to give of the former, Jack and Blueskin had no difficulty in recognising him.

Their joy may be imagined when they heard that Edgworth Bess had been so fortunate as to escape, and that the two villains had gone riding on towards London.

"You were quite right in your conjecture," said Jack, after a pause—"I do know that young girl. She has been carried off by those two men, and we have been searching vainly for her. Now we shall find her, no doubt."

"I hope you will, gentlemen—I hope you will!"

"Describe to me, then, exactly the situation of the public-house you left her at—we will go there at once."

The waggoner complied with this request without hesitation.

Both our friends thanked him repeatedly. Indeed, the waggoner grew quite fidgetty, they lavished so many praises upon him.

Having obtained these tidings, it may easily be imagined that Jack was full of impatience to be off.

No consideration of danger, however great, would have kept him back from London.

Then, at all risks, he was resolved to repair to the inn, where he hoped he should really discover the object of his search.

With some difficulty they got rid of the waggoner, after having obtained all the information from him that he possessed.

Then Jack, turning his horse's head towards London, cried:

"On—on, Blueskin—keep close behind; I cannot linger now! Forward—forward to London!—I am burning with impatience to reach the inn! Quick—quick! I trust we shall not be too late!"

Blueskin scarcely liked to give utterance to his own fears upon this point.

Some long time had elapsed since the waggoner had left her, and he thought it was scarcely possible that she would remain at the inn many hours.

He half anticipated a disappointment, though Jack did not.

He was elated with hope.

To both, however, it was a great source of satisfaction to feel certain that she had escaped unharmed from the clutches of Wild junior.

The narrative of the waggoner was quite sufficient to prove this.

She had escaped, and had reached London in safety!

There was just a chance that she might have fallen into the villain's power again; but this was too dreadful a thought to be entertained.

At length, without the occurrence of any particular incident, the inn was reached.

The day was drawing to a close when they encountered the waggoner, and this was a considerable distance from London.

By the time they reached the metropolis night had fairly set in.

A deep darkness filled all the streets, therefore Blueskin and Jack made their way along without being much in fear of detection. As for Jack himself, he never once thought of the risk he was incurring.

A cruel disappointment, as the reader is aware, awaited them on their arrival.

The landlady answered their questions promptly and truthfully.

To their inexpressible grief, they learned that Edgworth Bess had quitted the house on the preceding evening, since which time the landlady had neither seen nor heard anything of her.

She described how Edgworth Bess quitted the house, though she could not tell them which direction she had taken.

She stated, however, that she had made a promise to the homeless girl that if ever she was in want of aid or of a friend she was to come there.

Although so filled with grief, Blueskin and Jack both expressed their warmest thanks.

They earnestly requested the landlady, if she saw Edgworth Bess, to entreat her to stop, promising that they would call in a short time, if their search proved unsuccessful.

With very different feelings in his breast to those which held possession of it when he entered, Jack Sheppard took his departure, and again they commenced their apparently hopeless search.

CHAPTER DCV.

EDGWORTH BESS ELUDES GEORGE WILD AND NICHOLSON BY A HAIRBREADTH.

It was vexatious in the extreme that Blueskin and Jack Sheppard should miss Edgworth Bess by so mere a chance.

Before we describe their proceedings after leaving the inn, we will return to Edgworth Bess, who, it will be remembered, we last left crouching down in the shadow of a doorway.

She could hear at no great distance the much-dreaded voice of Wild junior.

He was in search of her—had, perhaps, some knowledge of her whereabouts.

She was almost ready to faint with apprehension at the bare thought that he might discover her present hiding-place.

This alarm so gained upon her that she felt she could not bear to remain any longer in that position.

She clasped her hands tightly over her temples, and tried to decide what was the best thing to be done.

How could she escape?

Her limbs trembled so excessively and her heart beat so feebly that she felt it would be vain and foolish to attempt to dart into the street and run away.

With some difficulty she raised herself from her crouching position, and in doing so her hand encountered a small object.

It was cold.

It was a kind of projection from the door-post, and for a moment, in the agitated condition of her mind, she could not make out what it was.

It was the round knob or handle of a bell.

No sooner did she make this discovery than the thought entered her mind that the people within the house, although total strangers to her, might be willing to afford her shelter and protection for a few minutes—until, indeed, her persecutor had left the neighbourhood.

She imagined no one could possibly refuse such a simple act of kindness.

Urged on, too, by the approach of her foes, she rung the bell.

The door was opened promptly.

Without uttering a word, Edgworth Bess sprang across the threshold.

She found herself in a narrow passage, which was feebly illuminated by an oil lamp.

"Did you want to see missus, ma'am?" said the girl who had opened the door.

"Yes—yes!" answered Edgworth Bess, faintly, and scarcely knowing what she said, for the whole of her faculties, mental and physical, were occupied in listening to what was going on in the street.

But the closely-fitting front door shut out all slight noises.

The servant-girl opened another door, and said:

"Please, missus, you're wanted."

In another moment, a decidedly elderly female, with a far from amiable-looking countenance, made her appearance in the passage.

"Do you want me?" she said. "Pray what's your business?"

"I—I wish to know," said Edgworth Bess stammeringly.

"Oh! yes, come about that card in the window I suppose," said the elderly female, jumping to a very erroneous conclusion. "I have apartments vacant if you would like to take them."

"Yes—yes—at least—that is——"

"Of course you would like to see them," said the landlady. "Here, Mary, bring a light."

"No—no," said Edgworth Bess. "I am so fatigued—so exhausted—so much agitated, that I scarcely know what I am saying. Let me sit down for a few minutes, and then I shall recover myself. I feel as if—as if——"

"What?"

"As if I should faint."

"Come in here; this is a quiet room; you can sit in it by yourself for a few moments, and then we will talk about the apartments."

"Very well."

"Can I do anything for you?"

"No—no, I am much obliged to you—no one can tell how much. Let me be for a few minutes, and then I shall be able to explain all."

Bang—bang—bang! came three heavy blows upon the front door of the house.

The elderly female started violently, and Edgworth Bess uttered a short, sharp cry.

"Some one else has seen the card, I shouldn't wonder. Excuse me a moment," she said, "I will go and see."

So saying, she abruptly left the room, closing the door behind her.

Edgworth Bess sank down upon a sofa totally incapable of making the slightest movement.

But although her physical faculties were thus bound up, she was able to hear distinctly, and so understood every word that was said, as well as to be fully aware of all that was going on about her.

She heard the door open, and then a voice, which jarred terribly on her nerves, said:

"I want to see your mistress, girl—now, at once!"

"Step this way, gentlemen—pray step this way," said the elderly female.

She ushered George Wild and Nicholson into another room.

She closed the door, and Edgworth Bess was unable to overhear another syllable.

But still her state of semi-unconsciousness continued.

It is scarcely to be expected that George Wild could be aware of the presence of Edgworth Bess in the house at that particular time—in fact, his errand had nothing to do with her; what he wanted was explained almost in the first words he uttered.

"I see," he said, gruffly, "that you have a card in the window."

"Yes, sir."

"I want to know whether you can find accommodation for us?—two bedrooms and one sitting room?"

"Dear me, gentlemen, if you'd only come a moment sooner—only a moment sooner."

"What do you mean?"

"If you had, then I could have suited you better than anyone else in London. As it is——"

"What?"

"Well, I scarcely know how to tell you—indeed, I don't know whether the rooms is took or not took."

"What are you talking about?" said Wild. "Answer me my question plainly!"

"Well, sir, so I will. I have some excellent apartments—two bedrooms and one sitting-room; this is the sitting-room, but——"

"Never mind your buts—go on!"

"Well, sir, I may as well explainate everything."

"I don't want to listen to your explanations!" said George, gruffly. "I want to know whether you have the rooms to let or not; if you have, name your own price, and it will be paid."

"Name my own price!" said the lodging-house keeper. "Ah, sir, I knew you were a gentleman at the very first glance, and that's why I was anxious to have you for a tenant. Now, if you would only listen to what I have to say, it would only take me a moment."

"Well, well—say on. What is it?"

"Hardly a moment before you knocked, a girl came in."

"What girl?"

"I don't know, sir—quite a stranger to me, but she was in a perfect flusteration—yes, sir, in a perfect flusteration. I make out that she wants the apartments, though she hasn't said as much. She was so agitated and so terrified that she could not speak at all, and she is sitting down now to recover herself."

Hearing these words, Wild junior started, and gave vent to an expression of astonishment.

"Describe her," he said, quickly. "What sort of a looking girl was she?"

The landlady, as well as she was able, gave him a description of the appearance of Edgworth Bess.

"D—n me!" he ejaculated, to her great amazement—"d—n me! found at last—found at last! Come on, Nicholson, my boy! Now, you old Jezebel, show us the room where you say this girl is!"

"Old what?" cried the lodging-house keeper, with a scream—"old what?"

"Devil!" said Wild junior. "Where's the room, I say? If you don't tell me——"

He did not trouble himself to complete his sentence, but significantly drew forth a pistol, and cocked it.

"Oh, sir!—oh, oh!—oh, don't! I beg—pray don't! Put that horrid thing away—the bare sight of it frightens me to death!"

"Then will you show me the room?"

"Oh yes, good sir—yes—decidedly yes! That's it—the one facing you on the other side of the passage."

With a kind of howl, such as Jonathan Wild himself used to utter, George sprang into the passage.

He placed his hand upon the knob of the door opposite.

He turned it.

But the door would not yield.

It was fast.

Some horrible curses then immediately fell from his lips.

Retreating a step or two, he lifted up his foot, and kicked the door with terrific violence.

The lock or bolt by which it was secured was of a flimsy description, and gave way at once.

He dashed into the room.

"A light—a light!" he cried—"bring a light!"

Nicholson seized the oil lamp burning in the hall, and hurried towards him.

He held it high above his head in the air, and by the aid of its sickly beams they glanced rapidly round the apartment.

It was vacant.

"Curse her!" ejaculated George. "The old jade has deceived us! So she is not here!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Nicholson. "This seems to give colour to her statements. We are just one moment too late!"

He hurried across the room to the window while he spoke.

It was open.

A rush of cold air came in.

"Escaped!" said George. "D—n me, the old she cat was right! Come on—she must be close at hand! Quick—we shall have her yet!"

So saying, George Wild sprang through the window into the street.

The lodging-house keeper had been struck dumb with amazement, and at first could not do anything to hinder the proceedings of her strange visitors.

Just as Nicholson was about to follow his employer, however, she recovered.

"Murder!" she shrieked—"murder!—thieves!—fire! Oh, stop them! Murder—murder!"



[EDGORTH BESS MEETS WITH AN OLD FRIEND AT AN OFF-PORTUNE MOMENT.]

She seized hold of Nicholson while she spoke.

"Let go, will you?" he said, savagely. "Let go, and stop your squalling! Oh, you won't! Then take that!"

With these words, he flung the heavy iron lamp full in her face.

The lodging-house keeper uttered a loud scream.

She relaxed her hold upon Nicholson, and fell back with a crash on the floor of the apartment.

Laughing loudly at this little practical joke—for so he considered it—Nicholson leaped through the window and ran after George Wild, whose form he could just distinguish in the distance.

Although they looked closely and carefully everywhere around them, they failed to catch sight of Edgworth Bess.

She had disappeared as completely as if she had sunk into the earth, leaving no trace behind.

Still the mere knowledge that she had been so lately in the vicinity was quite enough for George Wild.

No. 132.—BLUESKIN.

He felt sure that if he persevered that his search would in the end be rewarded:

Therefore he hurried up and down the streets in every direction, looking eagerly on all sides of him, but without result.

He cursed, and gnashed his teeth together in his disappointment, when, after upwards of an hour's fruitless search, he was compelled to pause by sheer exhaustion.

He was forced to come to the conclusion that she had again taken refuge in some house, and if such were the case he might search in vain for her.

Finally, he resolved to do the only thing that lay in his power, and that was to keep a close watch all round about the neighbourhood of the house from which she had escaped.

The suddenness of her disappearance convinced him that she could not have gone far.

CHAPTER DCVI.

EDGORTH BESS ELUDES WILD JUNIOR, AND FORTUNATELY MEETS WITH AN OLD FRIEND.

LEAVING Wild junior and Nicholson to keep their dreary watch, we will make an account of the proceedings of Edgorth Bess.

The state of half-insensibility into which the proximity of George Wild had thrown her, passed away as soon as she ceased to hear the detestable accents of his voice.

She heard the door closed, and at the self-same instant she rose to her feet.

That Wild junior had come to make some inquiries respecting her she did not doubt.

That the lodging-house keeper would answer him truthfully was tolerably certain.

It was, therefore, high time to be off.

Her first act was to hasten across the room to the door and secure it.

Then advancing to the window, she threw open the casement and sprang out into the street.

With the speed of a hunted hare she dashed along, taking no heed of her steps, and paying no attention to the streets through which she passed.

Suddenly, however, an ejaculation fell upon her ear.

Alarmed and excited as she was, yet she was conscious there was something familiar in the sound.

The voice was one that she had often heard before.

But yet she could not tell to whom it belonged.

Having such a few friends as she had, it was not likely she would be in doubt regarding the voice of any one of them, and therefore she was forced to the conclusion that it must be one of her foes.

With a slight scream of despair, she hurried onwards with redoubled speed.

To her intense agony and fright, however, she felt herself seized by some one.

Then it seemed to her as though all the earth was slipping away from under her feet.

She was about to faint, and nothing saved her from unconsciousness save the words that fell upon her ears.

"Thank Heaven!" said a voice—"I have found you at last! Look up, and don't feel alarmed! Your troubles are over now—all will be well!"

Edgorth Bess did look up.

Suspended from a rope that stretched from one side of the street to the other was a miserable oil-lamp.

By the dim, uncertain light that shone through the thick and dirty glass she perceived standing near her and holding her by the hands, the figure of a man.

He seemed past the middle age, and his body was bent in an awkward manner.

His countenance, although not by any means an agreeable one, was lighted up by a smile.

There was an expression in his eyes, too, which showed that his pleasure at this meeting was unfeigned.

For a moment Edgorth Bess taxed her memory in vain to know who this could be.

Then, all at once, recollection dawned upon her.

He was Steggs.

It is not to be wondered at that she did not recognise him at the first, for, as the reader will remember, he (Steggs) had received many severe injuries since she had seen him last.

The fearful fire in Wild's house had disfigured and scarred his features to such a degree that his whole face was materially changed.

Its effects were also visible in his body, which was wasted away.

"No one knows how long I have been searching for you!" he said. "But no matter! I have found you at last, and not too late. Do not tremble so! Believe me, there is no cause for alarm. You know me, do you not?"

"Yes," murmured Edgorth Bess, faintly.

"I am Steggs—you remember Steggs? I proved myself your friend on more than one occasion, and for a long time my sole business has been to search for you. At last I have succeeded, and I am content."

"I need a friend," said Edgorth Bess, returning the friendly pressure of his hands, "perhaps more so now than ever."

"Then be content—you have found one! Things have

changed greatly with me. I have now the power to do much."

"Then save me—save me! Take me far away from this locality!"

"What is your fear?"

"George Wild. You know him—Jonathan's son?"

"Never fear," said Steggs—"he shall not harm you!"

"But he is a violent, desperate man, and I dread him even more than Jonathan himself. I have had the narrowest escape from him that I possibly could have."

Steggs saw how great a state of agitation she was in, and hastened to relieve it.

He did the best thing he possibly could to effect his purpose, for he hurried her away from the spot where this brief conference had taken place.

"Where are you taking me?" she cried at length, when she found herself nearing an aristocratic quarter—"to what place are you taking me?"

"I will explain to you as we go along. I have much to say, for you must be in ignorance of many things that have occurred, and which have produced a startling effect upon your fortunes."

"I know nothing scarcely after my escape, when Jack was shot just as he was entering the boat."

"Well, then, in the first place, your uncle, Abel Donmull, your persecutor, and the originator of all your misfortunes, is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes. There is no conclusive evidence to prove that he fell by the hands of Jonathan Wild. His skeleton was discovered in one of the cells beneath the thief-taker's house—I say the skeleton, for the rats had devoured everything except the bones."

Edgorth Bess shuddered.

"And Jonathan Wild—where is he?"

"That I know not, though now I have discovered you I shall try hard to find him. His house was burnt down on the night when you escaped. I was there lying almost helpless in consequence of my wound, and was awoken by the suffocating smoke. By good fortune, the papers proving who you are, and placing your identity beyond all doubt and question fell into my hands. George Wild had them, though where he obtained them from I cannot tell. I watched him conceal them beneath a plank in the flooring of his chamber. I took them from there and concealed them again. On the night of the fire I managed to escape with my life, and so save the papers from destruction."

"Then I do, indeed, owe you much," said Edgorth Bess; "you have proved yourself a friend indeed; but I promise you shall not go unrewarded for your trouble. But the papers—where are they now?"

"I placed them in the hands of the Secretary of State. I crawled to his house as well as my injuries would permit me, and placed the packet in his hands. That caused a warrant to be issued for Jonathan Wild's arrest. He was tried and condemned to death, but through the connivance of the Governor of Newgate he escaped."

"Then the Secretary of State has seen those documents. Does he acknowledge me?"

"He does, and has offered a reward for anyone who will give tidings of your whereabouts. The matter has been placed in the hands of the Lord Chancellor, and all that is required is your presence."

"And you will take me to him?"

"Yes, I am doing so now."

"And you are sure that I shall have but little trouble in making my claim good?"

"Not the least trouble in the world."

"And I shall be rich and powerful?"

"Yes, very powerful. You will be in a position to preserve and protect those who have so long been your friends."

Edgorth Bess clasped her hands together with delight.

"That is what I desire," she said—"that is all I have been wishing for. Can it be possible that it has come to pass at last?"

"It has—it has, indeed!"

"And Jack and Blueskin—can you tell me what has become of them?"

"I cannot. A long—a very long time has elapsed since I saw them."

Edgorth Bess paused, and remained for several moments in deep thought.

"How shall I obtain intelligence of their whereabouts?" she asked, at length.

"I will see to that," said Steggs. "Now I have found you, I shall be able to turn my attention to your two friends, and to my bitter foe, Jonathan Wild. It will be a glad moment when I can assure them of your safety."

"And to what place are you now taking me?"

"To the residence of the Lord Chancellor."

"And shall I remain there?"

"That will depend entirely upon yourself. You must understand that you are now what is called a ward in chancery, and will continue to be so until you reach your majority, then you will be placed in full and entire possession of all your wealth and estates."

The prospect was a pleasing one to Edgworth Bess, and she remained for some time longer plunged in a delicious reverie.

She was building up castles in the air, all of them alas! to be soon demolished.

She imagined that not only were her own troubles over, but those of her two friends as well.

At length Steggs paused before the entrance to a plain but substantial-looking mansion.

"This is the place," he said—"this is the residence of the Lord Chancellor."

Edgworth Bess looked up, half in doubt and half in fear.

"I have only one caution to give you," he said, "and that is—say no more about your two friends than you are absolutely compelled; in fact, leave all to me, and wait until I can bring you tidings respecting them."

"I promise readily and gladly to all. I will obey you in all things, and follow your slightest wish."

"In that case, then, you will do well."

"But may I rely upon your exertions?"

"You may—you may indeed! I will serve you faithfully until my death!"

"Thanks—thanks!"

"As soon as I have seen you safely in the charge of the Lord Chancellor, I will leave you and begin my search after Blueskin. Doubtless I shall find him, or hear some intelligence. As soon as I do, rely upon it I will make you acquainted with it."

"Let me see you again before you start out upon this enterprise," said Edgworth Bess; "I may have some suggestions to make to you; but now my brain is in such a whirl and I am so excited that I can scarcely remember anything."

"I will do so—I will see you early in the morning. And now I believe our arrangements are complete."

"Yes—yes!"

"Then, above all things, remember the caution I have given you. You must not forget the danger in which they stand, and you must be aware of the great necessity there is for the greatest discretion on your part."

"Do not fear—do not fear! I will not forget any of your injunctions."

"Then, as all is so far arranged, follow me!"

The strange-looking pair had paused a few moments during this brief colloquy, but now they set forward again.

Steggs had taken hold of Edgworth Bess by the hand, and he led her towards the entrance of the mansion.

The poor girl's heart fluttered strangely as she ascended the steps before the door.

Her companion noticed it, and he entreated her to be calm, and assured her there was no need for apprehension.

Steggs then knocked loudly and importantly at the door.

It was flung open at once.

He was known to the footman who answered his summons, and Steggs was permitted to lead Edgworth Bess in unquestioned.

"Tell his lordship I am here," said Steggs, "and that I wish to see him upon a most important business. Tell him, too, that I have a young girl with me."

The footman stalked away, and presently returned.

The agitation of Edgworth Bess had by no means abated, and when the footman conducted them along the hall, and paused before a massive door, her heart beat with so much rapidity that she was almost deprived of breath.

A faint voice cried "Come in!" as soon as the footman knocked.

The door was flung open, and the next moment Edgworth Bess discovered that she had crossed the threshold.

CHAPTER DCVII.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES RESOLVE TO PUT UP FOR A SHORT TIME AT THE LONELY INN.

THE remembrance of the prognostications uttered by the old hag made a deeper impression upon Jonathan Wild than he would have cared to confess even to himself.

He shuddered at the bare thought, and several moments elapsed before he could recover his composure.

"We must not talk about capture," he said, huskily, to his companion; "that must never be."

"We are in continual danger of it," returned Mr. Noakes.

"Not so," returned Jonathan, grimly; "I have determined, at any rate, to avoid that."

"Avoid capture?"

"Yes."

"By what means?"

"By death! I would rather die ten thousand times than submit myself to any of the police officers. It would be easier to do so than to witness their exultation."

"But are you in earnest in what you said a short time since?"

"What was that?"

"About leaving England."

"Certainly I am. Did I not tell you I was thoroughly sick of this life?"

"You did."

"Come, Noakes, we may as well understand each other upon this point as not."

"What do you mean, Mr. Wild?"

"Are we both agreed to leave these shores?"

"I can answer for myself. I have earnestly desired it for a long time."

"I know you have. But bear in mind that we cannot go as we are."

"You said so," replied Noakes, gloomily.

"It is the truth."

"Well, have it so. What then?"

"Simply this. Are you willing to aid me, to back me up in every plan that seems likely to secure our object?"

"You mean in obtaining money?"

"Of course I do, and I want to know whether you are willing to do your share?"

"I am—I am."

"That is well."

"But I am not half so bold and daring as you are, Mr. Wild, and therefore shall be able to do little."

"Do all you can, and don't croak about danger and the like. I shall be satisfied then."

"And you will commence endeavouring to obtain this money soon?"

"At once."

"To-night?"

"Yes, to-night."

"And in doing so you will run no unnecessary risk?"

"Of course I shall not. Although I am determined never to allow my foes to take me prisoner, I am not anxious to quit this life."

"But you are so rash."

"You think so because you have not a bold spirit."

"And which direction shall you take?"

"We will make towards the Essex shore; we shall stand a better chance of embarking from that point than, perhaps, any other."

"I should think so too."

"On our way," continued Jonathan, "we will devise the best means we can for obtaining the money we require. If possible, we will take it at one bold stroke, the danger will thus be diminished."

This being agreed upon, the two villains took their course across the country in the direction of the place that had been mentioned.

Noakes did not know it, but in doing this Jonathan Wild kept much closer to London than he was aware of, or than he would have considered safe or prudent.

Little more was said, certainly nothing of any great importance. Their conversation turned upon the sole subject of their escape.

Mr. Noakes was exceedingly delighted to think he

had at last persuaded Jonathan Wild into adopting this course.

He was quite another being.

He believed safety was in sight, and that he should soon be out of danger.

Whether he was correct or not in these anticipations time will quickly show.

The country through which they passed was very thinly inhabited.

Jonathan Wild had been in the country for some time, and was well acquainted with the country.

Nor in the rear were there any indications of pursuit, so that, taking it altogether, Wild and Noakes were much more comfortable than they had been for a length of time.

At last, about an hour before midnight, Jonathan espied before him in the distance the swinging sign of a roadside inn.

In the darkness he could not tell whether there was any village in the vicinity, or whether it was only a kind of halting-place or half-way house between two towns.

From the appearance of the country through which he had lately passed, Jonathan judged the latter to be the more likely supposition.

"Do you see that inn?" he asked, raising his arm and pointing towards it.

"I do. What of it?"

"We will stay there for awhile."

"Stay there?"

"Yes. Why do you ask the question in such a tone of alarm?"

"The risk, Mr. Wild."

"Bah! you have begun again. You will try my patience. Let me ask you what danger there could be in staying awhile at a public-house in such an out-of-the-way place as this?"

To this question Mr. Noakes could give no direct answer, and therefore he remained silent.

"We will not stay long," added Jonathan, "and I would not think of halting at all if I did not believe that it was perfectly safe to do so. Here, however, the chances are a thousand to one against their having heard anything of us. I do not fear for a moment that we shall be recognised."

"But what is your object in stopping?"

"Firstly, because of our horses."

"They have had rest."

"I know that; but who can tell how soon the time may come when it will be necessary for us to put them to their speed? If they flag, we are lost."

"I know all about that; but—"

"Well, then, horses will not travel far or well without good, sound corn. Of this, as you know very well, they have had little for some time, and that is one of my motives for staying here, because I think they can have it with safety to ourselves."

"And have you another reason?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"To supply a want of my own."

"What want?"

"Brandy. I must have brandy, Noakes; to me it is the essence of life. I have gone long without it, but I can go no longer. I must have brandy, Noakes—brandy!"

"It is long since either of us had that, or a good meal either."

"And so you are willing to stay now?"

"Quite willing, for, upon consideration, the danger does not seem to be so great as I imagined."

"Of course it is not. Be cautious in your behaviour, and leave the rest to me. I will safely get you out of all difficulty, never fear."

Noakes had great faith in Jonathan's powers, and placed great reliance on them—and with good reason, for had he not on many occasions extricated him from positions of extreme peril?"

Every time they had come off unscathed, if we may except the slight wounds both had received.

In good truth, in spite of his fears, Noakes was glad enough of the chance of sitting down for awhile and resting himself.

He was entirely worn out by fatigue, and, moreover, he was half famished with hunger.

But a few minutes more brought them to the inn.

They pulled up in front of the building.

No notice was taken of their arrival, and Jonathan had to bawl loudly before anyone appeared.

At length the figure of a man emerged from the inn.

"What did you please to want, gentlemen?" he asked.

"We are here for a short time," returned Wild, gruffly; "if you can find accommodation for us and our horses."

"There's every accommodation," was the reply—"the best accommodation both for man and beast."

"Very good, then, take charge of our horses. Where is the landlord?"

"I am the landlord."

"And are you ostler too?"

"No, but I have got the laziest, most good-for-nothing fellow for one that ever lived. Dan—Dan!" he bellowed; "come here, and be d—d to you!"

Apparently this was a powerful invocation, for a strange-looking being—half-man, half-boy—came shuffling towards them.

"Where the devil have you been skulking to?" roared the landlord.

"I was a comin', sir."

"Coming be d—d! I tell you what it is, Dan."

"What, master?"

"If you don't alter, you must leave."

"All right, master. I guess you notice—there!"

"You shall leave this day week, d—n you!" returned the landlord.

"All right, master—don't put yourself out about it! Take it easy like I do!"

"You be d—d!"

"Yes, master."

Between them they held the two horses, and Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes alighted.

"Look after the horses, Dan," cried the former. "Give them plenty to eat, and trust to me."

"All right, sir."

The ostler led the jaded horses towards the stables, and Wild and Noakes followed the landlord to the inn.

"I have every accommodation," said the latter. "Would you like a private room?"

"Yes."

"Then I am very sorry, gentlemen, but I really haven't one at present."

"Then what the devil did you ask for?" growled Wild, kicking open a door and striding into a room.

This appeared to be a tap-room or kitchen where people sat down together in a free-and-easy way to partake of what refreshment they thought proper.

Several persons were present, seated at the various tables, when Wild entered so unceremoniously, and they all looked up at him in curiosity and surprise.

Jonathan's keen eye rested for a brief space of time upon the countenances of all present.

Then he drew in his breath with a feeling of relief.

They were all evidently farm labourers, or people employed in agricultural pursuits.

Doubtless they lived somewhere near at hand, and probably had never made a longer journey than ten miles in the whole course of their lives.

In this case, when communication between distant and out-of-the-way places was so very imperfect, it was scarcely likely they would be able to recognise the fugitives.

There were no newspapers then penetrating to remote country places; and the only means they had of obtaining news, was by asking questions of those travellers who happened to go there, and who had journeyed from some distant town.

Such a state of things can scarcely be realised by people living at the present day.

But such was the case then, and continued to be for many a long year afterwards.

It is to this fact, and this alone, that Jonathan owed his repeated escapes.

Now everyone in the land would be on the look-out.

Accurate descriptions would be sent everywhere, and the latest intelligence quickly and easily transmitted.

The only inland towns where the inhabitants were kept

posted up in the events of the day were those at which mail coaches stopped to change horses or for other purposes.

CHAPTER DCVIII.

JONATHAN WILD ALARMS THE LANDLORD OF THE ROAD-SIDE INN, AND OVERHEARS A SINGULAR STORY IN THE TAP-ROOM.

KNOWING all this, Jonathan Wild decided upon his course of action immediately.

Assuming a swaggering gait and a bullying manner, he strode across the room, and seated himself in the place nearest to the fire.

Endeavouring to imitate his boldness of demeanour, Mr. Noakes followed in his steps, and seated himself by his side.

Then the landlord stood in a respectful attitude, waiting for orders.

"Brandy!" roared Wild, in a voice that made the room ring again—"brandy!"

"Hot or cold water, sir?"

"D—n your water—I want none of it! There's enough in it already! Bring me half a pint in a jug!"

Probably this was the first time the landlord had received any such order, and for a moment all he could do was to stare with astonishment in the face of his customer.

"A half a pint?" he said.

"Yes, and be quick with it!"

"And what will you take, sir?" inquired the landlord of Mr. Noakes.

"The same as me," returned Wild, answering for him. "And now make haste!"

As he spoke, he picked up the huge poker, and this action so terrified the landlord that he bolted out of the tap-room into the passage at once.

Jonathan, however, had no hostile intentions towards him.

He thrust the poker between the bars into the hottest part of the fire, and there allowed it to remain.

Some kind of conversation had been going on when the two new-comers entered, but all lapsed into perfect silence.

They had enough to do to look at and observe the motions of the new-comers.

The landlord was some time before he returned, and Jonathan Wild kept muttering impatiently to himself and vigorously stirring the fire.

The fact was, the landlord of the village inn was so completely taken aback by the manner in which he had been spoken to and the orders he had received, that, as soon as he got into the bar, he plumped down on a chair and remained still for at least a minute.

Then, with many shakes of the head, he took down two jugs off a shelf, and poured into each of them half a pint of brandy.

Having done this, he carried them back into the tap-room, and not without some degree of apprehension.

Truly, Wild's appearance and manner were enough to alarm anyone.

The landlord was unquestionably the greatest bully there was for ten miles round, and he was always hectoring to those who would submit to it.

But Jonathan Wild overawed him, and he was inclined to be quite humble, and civil, and respectful.

He bowed humbly as soon as ever he reached the threshold of the tap-room.

"So you've come at last, have you?" exclaimed Wild, with an oath. "D—n me if I didn't begin to think you were never coming at all!"

He accompanied these words by drawing the poker from the fire and flourishing it round his head.

By this time it was red hot.

The landlord's terror increased, and even Noakes was slightly alarmed.

The landlord believed he had got a madman to deal with, and so, putting the two jugs down on the floor, he hastily disappeared.

"Fetch them here," said Wild to Noakes. "What a fool the man is, to be sure!"

Noakes obeyed immediately.

Jonathan, as soon as he obtained his jug, thrust the red-hot poker into it, and stirred the brandy vigorously

round and round, to the intense astonishment of the other persons who were assembled.

Then, flinging the heavy piece of iron down into the fender and causing a prodigious clatter, he placed the jug to his lips, and drank off half its contents at a draught.

"Ugh!" he said, with a shudder. "That landlord deserves to be roasted alive and to be basted with his own gravy for watering his brandy to such a degree!"

Noakes did not try the red-hot poker, but contented himself with sipping his fiery beverage in silence.

Then Wild called for a pipe and tobacco, and, having obtained these articles, he leaned back in his seat, and closed his eyes.

Mr. Noakes drank deeply of the brandy, and its fumes mounted quickly to his brain, so that in a short time he was glad enough to follow his companion's example and to close his eyes too.

After they had remained in this position for some time, maintaining a profound silence, the men's tongues gradually loosened, and the conversation which the entrance of Wild and Noakes had interrupted was resumed.

Then some more came in, and seated themselves near the fire.

"It's a 'nation cold night, and no mistake!" said one, rubbing his hands briskly together. "I am almost friz."

"Did you come by the old mill?" asked another.

"Yes."

"Did you see anything?"

"No, I didn't see nothing—did you?"

"No, not myself, but I've heard that the ghost is to be seen there again."

"What ghost—what ghost?" inquired several.

"Haven't you heard?"

"No, not till you spoke. What's it all about?"

"Why, I've been told the ghost has been seen again at the haunted mill."

"I don't believe it."

"Well, I wouldn't say that," exclaimed a huge fellow, at least six feet in height—"I wouldn't say that."

"Say what?"

"That I didn't believe it. Ghostses is ghostses, and I'm well aware of it."

"Well, Roger, did you ever see one?"

"Yes, I did."

"Where?"

"At Stubbs's mill."

"When—when?"

"Oh, it's a good many years ago now—five-and-twenty, I should think; but I recollect as well as if it happened yesterday."

"What was it like, Roger?" asked several, in an eager whisper.

"Why, a great, tall figure, wrapped all in white, and with a face as white as one of the squire's sheets. I seed it, and it made my blood run cold for many a long day afterwards."

"And have you ever seen it since?"

"No, and don't want to. For five-and-twenty years I've never been past Stubbs's mill after dark, and not a coach-and-four and a bagful of money should persuade me to do it."

"How was it you happened to be by then?"

"Why, I was young and foolish then, like a great many more I know, and didn't believe anything. I had been sitting here rather late, but at last they turned me out, and I went home. You know my nearest way at that time was right past old Stubbs's mill."

"Along the footpath across the meadows?"

"Yes; that cuts off a 'nation great corner in the road. I don't much care about that footpath by daylight, but five-and-twenty years ago, or more, I didn't care for it at dark."

"Well, go on, Roger. What about the ghost?"

"Ah! you speak as if you don't believe it; but wait till you have seen one—you will alter your tone then."

"I daresay I shall; but go on—go on."

"Well, then, I tell you, I took the footpath across the meadows, being, as that was, the nearest way home, and just as I was getting over the stile by the mill, what should I see but a tall white figure go gliding over the grass! I could not take my eyes off it, do what I would, and I couldn't move off the stile. Away it went, just like a shadow, only white—sometimes fast and sometimes slow."

"And was it coming towards you, Roger?"

"No, no, or I should not have lived to tell the tale."

"Which way was it going, then?"

"Why, to the old mill—for it was an old mill five-and-twenty years ago. You know the flight of wooden steps leading up to the door in the mill side?"

"Yes, yes; but they are half broken away now."

"I know that. Well, she glided up these steps one by one, but without seeming to touch any of them."

"She—she?" cried several.

"Yes—she."

"How did you know it was a woman, then?"

"Why, wasn't it Poll Powell's ghost? Of course it was! Who else's ghost could it be? I knew it, although she looked so tall and so white, and went up the steps so strangely."

"And what did the ghost do then?"

"Why, she passed into the mill, and I saw her no more."

Roger drew a long breath, and it was evident, although such a long time had elapsed, the impression produced upon him had not worn off.

"And what did you do, Roger?" asked several.

"Why, I ran off home as fast as I could, but not past the old mill. I was almost dead with fear, and I dropped down as soon as ever the cottage door was opened; and never since that day, as I said before, have I been past the haunted mill at night."

"They say this ghost has been seen again!"

"Yes; several have seen it lately. Just the same tall, white figure gliding over the fields and entering the mill."

"And who was Poll Powell?" asked another of the company. "Do you recollect her, Roger?"

"I should think I do. I am only just turned sixty, now; but yet I can remember her for fifty years. She was only a little girl then, and one of the prettiest girls in the village—I thought her the prettiest! We grew up close together, for her father's house was close to mine, and I often used to see her in the fields, and I made up my mind that when I was old enough I would have her for my wife, although she was a good bit older than me—but I thought that wouldn't matter."

No one would have expected that the rough-looking being who spoke these words could have displayed so much emotion at the remembrance of the past; but his voice grew very husky, and a tear glistened in his eye.

"There's plenty in the village knows the tale," he continued. "How I made love to her, and how she listened to me sometimes, and at others only laughed at me. But I made up my mind she should be my wife!"

"At that time the haunted mill, as we call it, was in full work, and it was kept by a miller named Stubbs, who had an only son, named Jasper."

"They carried it on between them, and were quite looked up to by the people in the village because they were so much better off than any of them."

"Well, Poll used to take the wheat to the mill to be ground, and there Jasper saw her and fell in love with her. He was a dashing young chap, with a smooth and oily tongue—just one to steal a girl's heart and then throw it away afterwards. He looked with a favourable eye upon Polly Powell, and made love to her whenever she went to the mill. Curse him!—curse him!"

CHAPTER DCIX.

OLD ROGER TELLS THE STORY OF THE HAUNTED MILL.

ALTHOUGH he was leaning back with his eyes shut, and seemingly fast asleep, not a single word of this conversation escaped the ears of Jonathan Wild.

At first he had only listened mechanically, but soon his feelings changed, and he listened as eagerly as anyone there present.

Whether this was in consequence of the interest possessed by the story itself, or whether it suggested to his plotting brain the groundwork for a future plan of operations we cannot at present tell.

Let it be sufficient to say that he listened with more than common interest to every syllable, and was ready to utter an ejaculation of impatience whenever Roger paused in his narrative, or whenever anyone interrupted him.

For Mr. Noakes, too, the story possessed a strange kind of fascination.

Strangely enough, he became impressed with the notion that he either had been, or should be in some way, connected with it; but that was mere fancy.

Old Roger shook with passion as he cursed the young miller who had looked with loving eyes upon the girl he intended to make his wife.

After a little while, however, he recovered himself, and then he continued:

"It was not long," he said, "before I found out how the land lay. I guessed her secret, and quickly became convinced that my suspicions were well grounded."

"Not only did the miller speak words of love to her, but the foolish girl listened to, and believed, what he said. Many and many times they met, but always in secret, for Stubbs was a purse-proud man, and would never have consented to a marriage between his son and one so poor as Polly Powell. I don't believe the old man ever suspected what his son was after. Perhaps he did, for it came out afterwards that young Stubbs was paying his attentions to a young lady who lived in the next town."

"It was clear he wanted Poll for no good, and so the event quickly proved."

"All noticed what a great change came over the poor girl, though none could guess the cause of it—not even myself—and she refused to say a word to satisfy the curiosity of anyone."

"But she grew paler and thinner day by day, and was often found in out-of-the-way places, where she fancied she would be unseen, weeping bitterly; but, as I have told you, she would not confide the cause of her grief to anyone."

"She was very unkindly treated at home, for her parents were angry with her for remaining silent. It was to no purpose, however—they could not get a word from her."

"And thus several months passed away. One night she went out, as she often did, and therefore nothing was thought of it. But the usual hour for retiring to rest came, and Poll did not return. They waited all night, and the next morning came without bringing her, and then her parents grew alarmed."

"The intelligence quickly spread, and people shook their heads wisely."

"Ah!" said one, "I don't wonder that the poor girl should run away. She has every excuse, poor thing! The way you treated her was shameful! Depend upon it, she has run away and gone to London!"

"That came to be the general impression. No traces or tidings of her could be seen or heard. She had disappeared completely, and therefore people believed that she had left her home in consequence of the unkind manner in which she had been treated."

"But, for one, I didn't believe this. I had jealous eyes looking all around, and my belief was that that young Stubbs had had something to do with her disappearance. But I didn't dare to utter my suspicions aloud. I was compelled to keep them to myself, for I was poor and he was rich, and I was to a very great extent dependent upon him. I determined to keep a very close watch upon him, and I did so. I am bound to confess that I never saw anything suspicious in his behaviour."

"Well, time passed on, and by degrees Poll became forgotten. None of her relatives were rich enough to make a journey to London in order to ascertain whether she had really gone there, and so they were compelled to content themselves as best they might, and bear their loss in silence. But it was a hard and bitter thought to them that her absence was due to their harsh treatment. But by degrees the reproaches of the neighbours ceased, and, as I told you, Polly Powell was forgotten by almost all except her parents and myself."

"There were no signs of guilt about Jasper; he looked just the same as ever, and but for my jealousy I should have considered my suspicions groundless."

"Then, at last, as I told you, when I stayed here so late and went towards the cottage where I lived across the meadows, I was thinking about Polly all the while; and as soon as I saw her hurrying across the meadow I knew her; had it been anyone else, I believe the fright would have killed me. I ought to have had the courage to have followed her into the mill, but I didn't."

"In the morning I told my story, and the whole affair

soon got wind—and before mid-day it was on the tongue's-end of everybody.

"It got round at length to Jasper's ears, and when he heard it first, many people were standing round. Instantly he turned deathly pale, and was covered with confusion. He staggered back, and clutched a wooden beam that formed a support to the mill with nervous terror. Everyone noted it, and drew their own conclusions from it.

"To such a pass did these events come, and so much were they talked about, that nothing would appease the people but a thorough and searching investigation into the whole affair.

"Jasper was so overcome that he was laid upon a bed of sickness, from which he could not rise.

"One day—I remember it well—the constables were sent for, the squire, and other magistrates attended, and it was determined that the old mill should be searched, for rumour said that the remains of Polly Powell would be found there, and rumour for once spoke the truth.

"The mill was searched carefully in every part, until at length they came to the foundations. The under portion was filled up with rubbish, the accumulation of many years. This was all carefully turned over and examined.

"The result was, that the remains of the unfortunate girl were found there, and clasped convulsively in her arms was an infant. A further search disclosed an iron bar, that was used in the mill, and a clasp knife. All these articles were carefully removed.

"The commotion was intense.

"The bar of iron was recognised to be one that was used in the mill, and which had been missing since the night on which Polly Powell disappeared. The clasp knife, too, was well known to be Jasper's, for his name was engraved upon it.

"The constables went in a body to the miller's house. They forced the guilty wretch to rise, and overcome by guilt, he poured out a full confession of the details of his crime. He had engaged the poor girl's affections, and she had placed reliance on his hollow promises.

"All wonder at Poll's strange behaviour now ceased.

"The mill was their usual meeting-place. One night she came there, and Jasper, wearied and tired of her, treated her so harshly that her heart almost broke, and in the midst of her grief she gave birth to the child that was pressed so tightly to her breast.

"It was then the impulse came over him to rid himself of all the trouble by one blow, and therefore he struck her a heavy blow with the iron bar. This he believed had killed her.

"He went down into the foundation of the mill, and removed a quantity of rubbish there, then, opening a trap-door in the flooring, he ruthlessly cast the mother and her babe into the abyss. But a low, wailing cry ascended from the dreary depths below. One or both of his victims lived.

"The fury of a demon then possessed him. Drawing his knife, he leaped down through the trap-door and finished his barbarous work.

"Upon this confession he was taken to prison and brought before the judge. He was found guilty, sentenced to death, hanged, and then his remains were hung upon a gibbet, the remains of which can still be seen a few yards from the mill.

"Old Stubbs was bowed down by grief, and soon expired. The mill was deserted and allowed to fall to rack and ruin. No one could be found who was willing to become its tenant—no one would go near it if they could avoid it, and so from that day to this it has been called 'The Haunted Mill.'

"That's the story, then," added old Roger, after his auditors had all drawn a long breath at the conclusion of his narrative—"that's all, and now let me ask you whether you would believe in ghosts if you had the experience I have had?"

"And—and," said some one in a shaky voice, "is this ghost to be seen again—the ghost of Mary Powell?"

"That I don't know," returned Roger. "Surely now, her spirit ought to be at rest. No—no," he added, with a shake of his head, "it can't be her. I would sooner think that some other barbarous crime has been committed near the spot."

This was a suggestion that filled all their breasts with horror.

"Who has seen it?" cried another—"who has seen this ghost?"

"I don't know who has seen it, but it's talked of by many."

It was just at this juncture that the landlord entered the room.

"Come—come," he asked, "are you going to stay here all night? If you are, you had better pay for your lodging; if not, be off, for I am going to close the shutters; I shan't sit up any longer for anybody!"

It was quite a regular thing for the landlord to turn his regular customers out in this manner when the hour grew late, so, without a murmur, they emptied the vessels before them, and one by one took their departure.

But although it would have been at least half a mile nearer for many of them to have taken the path across the meadows and gone past the old mill, not one of them attempted it.

They even shrank back from the little wooden stile on the roadside that led into the fields.

Upon hearing the voice of the landlord, both Wild and Noakes opened their eyes and again looked about them.

"Brandy," said Wild, fiercely, as he emptied his jug—"more brandy! Be quick, and don't put so much water in it as you did the last time!"

He held out the jug to the landlord as he spoke, who took it with a trembling hand, and then rushed precipitately from the room.

CHAPTER DCX.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES REPAIR TO THE HAUNTED MILL, AND ARE STARTLED BY AN APPARITION.

The landlord made good speed on this occasion.

"There you are, sir," he said, entering the room and placing the jug on the table. "Would you like to stay here all night, gentlemen; I have every accommodation?"

"No," said Wild, "we'll be off. Tell the ostler to get the horses ready, and then let me know what the reckoning is."

Jonathan drank off his other half-pint of brandy, while Noakes was finishing his first.

Strangely enough, however, the spirit did not produce an intoxicating effect upon either.

It merely made them bolder and more courageous than they had been.

"Why not have stayed here all night?" said Noakes, as soon as the landlord had left the room, "we appear to be perfectly safe."

"No doubt we are," said Wild; "but I have something else in my mind—it will not answer my purpose."

"What do you intend to do?"

"That you will quickly see—never mind it at present."

The landlord again made his appearance, bowing at every step.

"How much is there to pay?" said Jonathan, thrusting his hand into his pocket.

"Nine-and-sixpence, sir."

"Here's half-a-guinea, and keep the change, though you're a d—d bad waiter!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"Are the horses ready?"

"Yes, Dan will have them round at the front door by the time you can get there."

Wild and Noakes both rose, and made their way to the front of the inn.

Here they found the ostler waiting for them.

The two villains quickly mounted, and Jonathan tossed the ostler half-a-crown.

"There," he said, "take that, and drink my health with it."

At the same time he spurred his horse viciously, and the creature tore along the road and was out of sight directly.

Mr. Noakes followed close behind.

Jonathan galloped on for some distance, until, in fact, he came to the summit of a hill, and here he pulled up.

Mr. Noakes quickly placed himself by his side.

Then Jonathan took a long and careful survey of the country around him.

A very spacious view could be obtained from that hill, especially by daylight.

Now, however, it was not possible to see to any great distance.

Wild looked up to the sky.

It was covered with dark clouds, which were rushing violently along at a rapid rate.

Suddenly, through a long, rugged rift, the moon peeped forth.

As if by magic, all the landscape was revealed, and Jonathan Wild availed himself to the utmost of this opportunity to look about him.

"There it is!" he exclaimed, exultingly—"there it is!"

"What—what?"

"There—there! Can you see it?"

"The old mill?"

"Yes."

"Yes, I see it. What of it?"

"Keep your eyes fixed upon it then, and remember the direction as well as you can."

"Surely you are not going towards it?"

"Indeed! but I am though."

"For what purpose?"

"Can you not guess?"

"No."

"You heard the story that old man told?"

"Of course I did. What's that to do with us?"

"A great deal, as you will find. I am going there."

"But to what end?"

"Can it be possible that you are so dull of apprehension as not to understand?"

"You don't intend to take up your quarters there, surely?"

"Indeed I do!"

"Then I shall not accompany you."

"Why not?"

"Because—because!"

"Are you afraid of ghosts?"

"Well, no—not exactly that!"

"Bah! don't be a fool, Noakes! Look at things with an eye to our own advantage! As soon as that old man began his story I made up my mind what to do."

"What was that?"

"To take up my quarters in the mill. Can you not perceive the immense advantages we should derive from it, and are we to be scared away by a mere shadow?"

"But what are these advantages?"

"I am going, first of all, to make an examination of the place. If I find it to be what I anticipate, we shall be able to conceal ourselves there as long as we think proper. There will be no fear of discovery, for the country clowns about here will not have the courage to approach the spot. Of necessity, we shall be some time in collecting the amount we require. The lower portion of that old mill will be just the place to conceal it."

"But—but—"

"I suppose you have some foolish objection to going there?"

"I have!—I don't own to being very courageous, and if there's one thing that I am more afraid of than another it is ghosts!"

"Bah!"

"It's all very well for you to affect to despise them, Jonathan Wild; some day or other you will probably think differently!"

"Noakes!"

"What?"

"Just listen to me once for all and all—for once! Are you listening?"

"I am."

"Well, then, I intend to stand no more of your foolery—not a bit of it, understand!"

"What foolery?"

"Make any more objections to this reasonable proposition of mine, and I no longer consent to leave England. Now, then, you may take your choice—which will you do?"

"You are too hard upon me, Mr. Wild."

"Not at all. You are a fool, and cannot see what is to your benefit. Now, then, answer me quickly—will you come with me to the mill or not?"

Reluctantly Mr. Noakes murmured an assent.

"Come, then—no more hesitation. This way—follow me over yonder fence."

As he spoke, Wild pointed to some low palings dividing a field from the high-road.

Over these the horses leaped easily, and then they made their way in almost a direct line for their destination.

During their journey, the moon once or twice peeped through small openings in the clouds, and enabled them to correct any error they might have made in their course.

Mr. Noakes, however, was by no means anxious to push forward.

Of the two evils presented to him, he had preferred rather to accompany Wild to the mill than to abandon the project of leaving England.

But the idea of doing this presented to his mind a thousand terrors—terrors of which he was half ashamed himself, but which nevertheless had the complete mastery over him.

He was compelled to keep pace with his companion, however; and, after a short ride, Jonathan drew rein, and waited for the moon once more to light up their proceedings.

He saw that there was a large gap in the clouds of very great extent, and that it was in the direct course of the moon.

Another moment, and the bright, pure light illuminated everything around with a brilliancy that was absolutely startling when compared with the darkness which had previously prevailed.

Another low paling, about three feet in height, alone separated him from the field in which the mill stood.

Upon this object the eyes of Wild and Noakes became immediately fixed, and upon it, too, the moon seemed to concentrate all her rays, so that there was not a single portion of the old structure that was not brought into vivid relief.

It presented a most dilapidated appearance.

The sail had long since rotted away and disappeared, and the wooden rails over which they had been drawn were broken in many places, leaving the fragments sticking up strangely.

A curious kind of moss had overgrown all the lower portion of the structure, and all around was quite a mass of rubbish, consisting of fragments which had been torn by the force of wind and weather from various parts of the mill.

There were the steps, ruinous and broken, just as old Roger had described them.

There was the little black door at their summit, leading into the interior—the little door through which poor Mary Powell had passed and never emerged again in life.

There was a strange kind of fascination in the place, and how long Wild and Noakes would have continued gazing upon it is hard to say.

But a sudden movement on the part of both their horses distracted their attention.

The creatures were evidently greatly terrified.

Their eyes seemed almost starting from their sockets.

At the same instant, both Wild and Noakes looked across the meadow in the direction to which the horses' heads were turned.

At the same instant, there came from their lips a startling cry, which still further alarmed the horses.

Jonathan Wild and his companion trembled from head to foot.

They rubbed their eyes.

Could they be dreaming, or was there indeed some truth in what the men had said? Was this a confirmation of their statements?

Surely yes.

Sweeping over the long rank grass in the meadow was a tall white figure.

Its face was turned to the mill, towards which it advanced with a strange, jerking, spasmodic motion.

Breathlessly did they gaze upon this strange spectacle.

It was no delusion of the senses, no hallucination, no phantom conjured up by their fears, and visible in their minds only.

No, it was there—something evidently palpable.

Both saw it at the same time—both were terrified, and so were the steeds as well.

Fright completely froze up Mr. Noakes's faculties.

He had the strongest desire to turn and fly far away from that spot.

But his body refused to yield obedience to his will, and his eyes remained riveted upon the ghastly object before them.

Onward over the meadow it went still, with the same odd, jerking motion, and yet making marvellous speed.



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES WATCHING THE APPARITION.

In a perfectly straight line, it took its way towards the flight of broken steps.

In something less than a minute, the white figure reached the foot of them.

Then, with just the same movement, it ascended.

Upon reaching the top, the figure paused.

The moon now shone upon it with what appeared to be a preternatural brightness.

The broken wood-work of the old mill formed a background, which threw out in clear and startling relief every outline of the strange white form, and, as they continued to gaze, Wild and Noakes perceived that in its arms it held some bulky object, which it appeared to be pressing to its breast.

From the distance where they stood, it was impossible to see distinctly what this tightly-clasped object could be; but their imaginations quickly made it out to be nothing else than the form of an infant.

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In a second the figure turned round, and seemed to vanish through the door leading into the mill.

The disappearance of the white figure broke the spell which bound both Wild and his companion.

The latter, with a yell of fear, was about to turn round and gallop off, when Jonathan, with an oath, seized hold of the bridle of his horse and frustrated his intention.

"Fool!—idiot!" he shrieked. "Where are you going now?"

"Away—away!" said Noakes. "Anywhere but in this place! Away—away! I can't stay here! Death—the most lingering and tormenting death—would be infinitely preferable to life near this spot! Away—away!"

"Peace, fool!" cried Wild, angrily—"peace, fool! We must see further into this matter!"

Just then a huge cloud swept suddenly before the moon's disc, and in a moment the whole surrounding scene was plunged into deep and impenetrable darkness.

CHAPTER DCXI.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES WATCH THE DEPARTURE OF THE SPECTRE FROM THE HAUNTED MILL.

BUT for the grasp Jonathan Wild continued to hold upon the bridle of Mr. Noakes's horse, that individual would certainly have left the spot.

A furious struggle took place, which was put an end to by Jonathan saying:

"Well, be it so; we will ride away and quit this place, and I will altogether abandon the project of leaving England."

No other words could possibly have had such an effect upon Mr. Noakes as those.

Their departure for a foreign land was the sole object that engaged his thoughts.

It was never absent from his mind, and he looked forward with delight to the time when he should be at rest and no longer tortured by a thousand fears, as he had been for so long.

"You know your power over me," he said; "I would endure much rather than that idea should be lost sight of."

Wild laughed.

"Now tell me what you wish to do, and why you desire to pry into this matter."

"For once I will explain all my motives to you."

"It would be better if you made a practice of doing so."

Wild took no notice of this remark.

He went on:

"While I sat in the public-house listening to the tale told by that old man, I instantly concluded that the old mill was, above all others, the one best suited to us."

"You mean as a hiding-place?"

"Yes, certainly. We can take up our quarters there without fear of molestation."

"But of what service is a hiding-place," said Noakes, "if you are in earnest in what you say about leaving England?"

"Have I not told you that we cannot go without a certain sum of money?"

Noakes groaned.

"At any rate, I don't intend to leave without I am in possession of a tolerable amount. I am anxious to obtain that in the easiest and least dangerous manner."

"Well, well—why do you pause?"

"Simply to know whether you are listening heedfully to what I am saying."

"Of course I am."

"Well, then, I thought, after what we heard, that this spot would be shunned by everybody, consequently it would be the best for us not only to secrete ourselves in, but our wealth as well."

"I think I understand what you mean, and in that respect your idea was right enough; but—"

"I will listen to your objections presently," interrupted Wild; "I don't want to hear them at present."

"Well, then, make haste to get to the end of your speech."

"When we have an opportunity of making a good booty, what more easy than to sally forth from this mill? And, again, when we have succeeded in obtaining it, what more easy to retire and hide it here?"

"It's a good place. I am bound to admit that it would have answered our purpose admirably."

"It will answer it."

"I don't know that. You—you—"

"What?"

"You seem to forget the horrible sight we have just seen."

Noakes shuddered.

Wild laughed discordantly as he answered:

"You are a coward."

"And so are you," retorted Noakes, "though you try hard to pass yourself off for a bold man."

"All this talk is useless—actions should be the test of courage. I tell you again, I intend to see further into this matter."

"But how? In what way?"

"Why, I will find out who and what it is that has entered the mill before us. Don't start and turn pale, my

courageous friend, I am resolved to do it, and you shall accompany me."

"What! enter the mill?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Never!"

"Very well, then, you know the consequences."

Mr. Noakes broke out into a torrent of curses.

He was beginning to see how Jonathan Wild would make use of his wish to leave England to make him subservient to all his plans, however unpleasant they might be.

"But—but, Mr. Wild——" he stammered.

"But what?"

"Tell me your opinion of what we have just seen."

"My opinion?"

"Yes. Was that some supernatural being, or was it——"

"I cannot answer that question," replied Wild, "until I have gone into the mill and ascertained. That's just what I intend to do. So no more words. Forward; leap over the fence, and for the next half-hour submit yourself to my commands."

Mr. Noakes saw that it was in vain to contest the point any longer.

Jonathan Wild had managed to obtain a complete ascendancy over him. He was never more his master than at the present time.

He trembled from head to foot, and his pallid face was covered with a profuse cold perspiration.

His teeth chattered together, and his eyes rolled wildly. Nevertheless he felt constrained to follow his companion over the fence.

The distance to the mill was trifling.

Jonathan Wild stopped in a place where the old building cast the deepest shadow.

There he felt pretty sure they would be able to remain unseen by anyone who was not very close at hand.

And what of Jonathan Wild's own feelings all this while?

Was he indeed so bold-hearted and courageous as his behaviour towards Mr. Noakes would seem to show?

Was he altogether unmoved by the strange spectacle he had witnessed?

Had he got rid all at once of those superstitious fears which had ever found a home in his breast?

Certainly not.

But Jonathan's boldness of demeanour was caused chiefly by his companion's manifest alarm.

He scorned and despised him for it, and felt that he could not be guilty of such folly himself.

Moreover, even at a personal sacrifice, it always afforded him great pleasure to exult over anyone or to inflict torture upon them. So long as he was tormenting some one else, Jonathan Wild scarcely cared what he endured himself.

And he was well aware that he was inflicting exquisite torture upon Mr. Noakes by compelling him to approach the mill.

His own experience told him what superstitious fears were like; no one knew better than himself how hard it was to struggle with them.

His courage, then, was altogether spurious and put on for the reasons we have named.

It may be, too, that Jonathan Wild had some ideas of his own respecting what he had seen.

But whether those ideas were correct or erroneous nothing but the progress of events can show.

Having reined in his horse at the spot we have mentioned, he alighted.

Among the exterior supports of the mill he had no difficulty in finding some object to which he could secure his horse and prevent him from straying away.

Almost mechanically, and without uttering a word, Mr. Noakes followed his example.

"There," said Jonathan, "the horses are all right; we shall have no occasion to trouble ourselves further about them. How do you feel now, Noakes? Are you better?"

Some muttered curses escaped from the ex-Governor's lips.

"Well, then, look to your pistols, and see that they are all right, though you tremble so violently that I'll be d—d if you won't shake the priming out of them!"

While speaking these words, Jonathan made a careful

inspection of his weapons, and, selecting one pistol, he held it conveniently in his left hand ready for immediate use.

He told his companion to do the same, then, clutching him by the arm, he added :

"Now, then, tread on tiptoe; this is the way; mind, no noise, recollect—no noise!"

The horses had been tethered on that side of the mill opposite the one where the steps led up to the little door.

Therefore the two villains had to make their way round one half of it.

They trod stealthily and cautiously.

Their footsteps produced no sound, however, except a faint rustling, for the ground was covered with tall, rank grass.

In another moment, however, they came round the corner of the mill, and Jonathan, raising his arms, said :

"Look, Noakes—look, there are the steps."

"I see them."

"Well, then, no struggles, no hesitation, no foolish fears—I am going up those steps into the mill, and you must accompany me."

Mr. Noakes trembled like one in an ague fit at the very thought.

He could not speak, however, for his terror was so great that his tongue clung tightly to the roof of his mouth.

Fear also nearly deprived him of the use of his limbs.

But suddenly, when within a short distance of the steps, Jonathan Wild stopped.

His hold upon his companion's arm relaxed.

Noakes, however, with a stifled shriek of alarm, clutched Jonathan tightly, and clung to him as though that was his only chance for safety.

The faces of both were turned in the same direction, namely, towards the little flight of steps we have so frequently mentioned.

The moon had again peeped out from among the clouds, and had once more illuminated the haunted mill and its surroundings.

Everything was as distinctly visible as by daylight.

The cold, clear rays fell upon the countenances of Wild and Noakes, and showed that they were pale to ghastliness.

The lips of both moved convulsively, and their eyes were starting from their sockets.

Jonathan's alarm on this occasion was fully as great as his companion's.

Standing on the little square piece of woodwork near the door was the same white, mysterious-looking object which had before struck terror to their souls.

It presented exactly the same appearance.

Its face was turned towards the moon.

Had their lives depended upon it, neither of the two villains could have moved a single step.

They had only power to watch the movements of the spectre.

By the appearance of the mysterious figure, it would seem as though it was availing itself of the light of the moon to take a careful survey of all around.

But this might be fancy.

Certain it is that, after the lapse of a short time, the figure began to descend the steps slowly and deliberately.

Its long white garments fluttered behind it and trailed upon the moss-grown steps.

Reaching the meadow, it again set off across it, moving strangely and spasmodically, as though the joints were stiff, like those in a suit of rusty armour.

It retreated rapidly—so rapidly that Jonathan Wild felt his astonishment increase.

It was not, however, until the white figure reached the hedge surrounding the meadow that Jonathan Wild to some extent recovered his composure.

Then, with a horrible oath, he pointed the pistol in the direction of the spectre and pulled the trigger sharply.

There was a sharp clicking noise, a faint crash—a puff of white smoke, and no more.

The spark from the flint had only ignited the powder in the pan.

It was at that very instant that the figure glided through

the hedgerow and entirely disappeared, leaving those who had watched it filled with a thousand vague and nameless terrors.

CHAPTER DCXII.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES MAKE A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF THE OLD MILL.

JONATHAN WILD uttered a curse when the pistol misfired.

The next moment, however, he congratulated himself, and esteemed it a fortunate accident.

The impulse to fire had come over him all at once, and, without pausing to consider, he had obeyed it.

But now he remembered that, however effective the shot might have been so far as the spectre was concerned, and however agreeable it would have been to have had that matter settled, yet, at the same time, the report of a fire-arm would be carried far on the night air, and might reach the ears of some one who would be curious enough to endeavour to discover what was meant.

Now that the ghastly-looking figure was no longer in sight, both felt considerably relieved; in fact, their feelings underwent a total alteration.

They breathed freely and easily.

"We have lost the chance for to-night," said Wild, regretfully and half angrily; "but no matter. Perhaps, now that you are satisfied that the figure is no longer there, you will no longer object to enter the mill?"

"You were as much afraid as I was," returned Noakes, fiercely. "Let me see you go into the mill, and I will follow."

"Come, then—I am ready."

Jonathan was more at ease now that he knew the spectre had departed, therefore he mounted the steps boldly.

Upon reaching the top, he found out how it was that the figure had disappeared so suddenly.

It had appeared to vanish through the door.

There was no door there.

The interior of the mill was very dark, and made it appear from the distance as though there was one.

"See," he exclaimed, "here is one thing cleared away, and the rest no doubt will be as easy."

"Be careful how you advance," said Noakes, "a mill is a curious place—there may be trap-doors and open places in the flooring, and if so we may lame ourselves."

"That's the most sensible thing you have said to-night, Noakes; but wait a moment, and I will show a light."

Noakes wondered where his companion had procured the means of obtaining one.

The fact was, Wild had stolen the tinder-box from the public-house, and had also purloined a piece of candle.

With some trouble he obtained a light, and then, holding the candle above his head, he looked around.

He could only see dimly and imperfectly, and yet he perceived that the interior of the mill was quite as dilapidated as the exterior.

Some heavier and more substantial portions of the machinery remained intact, but the large stones used for grinding the corn were covered with green moss and the iron-work encrusted with rust.

Having satisfied themselves that the flooring was secure, they commenced making an examination of the building.

They met with no particular reward, however, for their search.

It presented just such an appearance as anyone might suspect such a place would.

There was nothing mysterious or remarkable anywhere.

There was a trap-door in the flooring, which they raised.

"This is the one, no doubt," said Wild, "down which Jasper threw the bodies of the mother and her infant. Let us see what is below."

He laid flat down upon the floor of the mill as he spoke, and let his arm hang down to its full length into the abyss.

The light of the candle, however, was not strong enough to illuminate that lower chamber in the mill, but he could see rubbish and dirt of all kinds below, as

though the place had been used always as a receptacle for lumber.

"There is nothing to be found down there," he said.

So, rising to his feet, he closed the trap-door again.

"You still think of taking up your quarters in the mill?"

"Certainly I do, without you can suggest some better place."

"I cannot. But what part shall you choose?"

"Not the lower, for a certainty. We will go over the whole building, examine every part of it, and then decide."

With this intent they gradually ascended, sometimes by means of rude steps and at others by climbing up the machinery.

Without meeting with any accident or making any discovery, they at length arrived at the topmost portion of the mill.

This was the part through which an iron shaft passed, connected with a wheel, by means of which the sails could be placed so as to catch the wind.

It was a place of very limited dimensions.

The roof sloped downwards to a sharp angle, and was composed of wooden planks that were now in an advanced state of decay.

There was just room for Wild and Noakes to seat themselves, and that was about all.

"I think this is the place," said Wild. "I have not seen anything suitable as yet."

Noakes looked around him with a dissatisfied air.

"It is not quite so comfortable as we should like," returned Wild; "I admit that, but then there are many advantages."

"What are they?"

"Why, the first is, from our elevated position, we shall command a view of the country for miles."

"But all is dark."

"I know that, but it will be perfectly easy to cut holes in this woodwork large enough for us to see out of easily, and yet which will be invisible to people standing below."

"Yes," returned Noakes, thoughtfully, "we should certainly perceive when any officers were approaching."

"We should; and you may, if you like, make it your duty to keep a sharp look-out."

"It's getting towards morning now, I should think."

"Yes, it will be daylight shortly."

"And the horses—what do you intend to do about them?"

"Ah, I had forgotten about them entirely! I must descend to release them. I cannot do better than turn them loose in these fields—ten to one if they excite suspicion—then we can recapture them easily."

"Is there no place here that we can put them?"

"I fear not; it would be a greater risk. Out of curiosity, people might come to the lower part of the mill and pry about. They would not discover us, but they would certainly find the horses."

"That's true enough."

"Then, if you like, I will descend, and release the horses, and leave you here?"

"Why so?"

"During my absence you can occupy yourself with cutting the holes I mentioned."

"Very good," said Noakes—"just as you like."

Jonathan rose to his feet and once more sought the lower part of the mill.

He was getting familiar with the place, and ran down the steps outside rapidly.

He untied the horses and turned them loose.

Then he made his way back again.

But Mr. Noakes, as soon as ever his companion in crime had departed, put his finger by the side of his nose, and shook his head, as though he had really thought of something clever.

"You mean something, Jonathan, by this. I will descend and watch your movements. Aha! fool as you think me, I shall be a match for you."

Accordingly, at the imminent risk of breaking his neck, Mr. Noakes descended.

For once in his life, however, he was mistaken.

Jonathan Wild had no evil or ulterior intentions.

Just as the latter was returning he encountered his ally.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed—"what are you doing here? Afraid to stay alone, I suppose?"

"You can have it that way if you like," returned Noakes.

"What do you mean, fool?"

"Perhaps I am not such a fool as you take me to be, although you are such a clever man yourself. I followed you in order to see what you meant."

"You thought I was playing you a trick, did you? Bah! I have no patience."

And, uttering these words, Jonathan climbed up to the little wooden chamber we have described.

Immediately upon his arrival here he set to work to show that he was quite in earnest when he spoke about making holes in the woodwork.

The timber being very rotten, he had but little difficulty in working at it with his knife, and just about sunrise the pair had managed to make a number of lookholes—if they may be so called—by the aid of which they could command a view of the country for many miles in every direction.

They watched the sun rise higher and higher in the sky, and, when the day had fairly begun, Jonathan Wild uttered short ejaculations of satisfaction as he looked through the loopholes one after another.

As is generally the case, a piece of rising ground had been selected for the situation of the mill.

The building itself was of tolerable height, and therefore it will be easy to understand that the prospect obtained from the very top of it was extensive indeed.

Jonathan Wild could not feel quite certain that none of his pursuers were at hand, and therefore at every loophole he paused and looked scrutinisingly across the face of the country.

But all presented a delightfully quiet and calm appearance.

The fields, and trees, and little streams of water looked beautiful as they were tinted with the golden light that beamed from the rising sun.

The contemplation of the scene would have afforded exquisite delight to almost anyone except the being who gazed upon it.

Turning to his companion, he said:

"I have good news for you. The officers are nowhere in sight."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. I will take upon myself to say that no body of officers of any size is within a considerable distance of this spot."

Noakes gave a sigh of relief.

"I knew that would be good news for you," said Wild. "And now shall I tell you what will be your wisest course?"

"What?"

"To follow my example."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Look."

Jonathan Wild stretched himself out at full length on the floor of the little chamber, which was just long enough to allow him to do so.

"There," he said, "I am going to sleep now, and you can lie down and do the same if you think proper."

"I am not sleepy."

"Well, then, perhaps so much the better. I am, and will go to sleep soundly. You can keep watch, so as to give the alarm when any police officers are in sight. When you are tired, wake me, and I will take your place."

To this arrangement Noakes willingly enough gave his consent.

He could not make himself easy enough to go to sleep and leave no one to watch for the appearance of the officers.

And in this manner was the whole of the day passed.

Jonathan took his turn to keep watch while his companion slept, and when night again closed in both felt refreshed and much stronger for their rest.

"I am only short of one thing," said Wild, "and then I could make myself happy enough."

"And what's that?"

"Brandy. I must have brandy! It is that alone which keeps me alive and enables me to go through these adventures. Brandy—brandy! It is the elixir of life; and

you will find that, should the time come when I am deprived of it and cannot obtain any, I shall die."

"Well," growled Noakes, "you may make your mind easy—there's no brandy to be had here, so I would advise you to trouble your head no more about it."

CHAPTER DCXIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES WATCH THE MOVEMENTS OF THE APPARITION.

A STRANGE expression at this moment came over Jonathan Wild's face.

And this was the only notice which he took of his companion's speech.

It was evident, however, that by degrees Mr. Noakes was plucking up a spirit, and there seemed every probability that, in the future, Jonathan would have more trouble in controlling him than he had hitherto.

The darkness continued to increase as night fairly came.

Then, in the east, could be seen a faint silvery light, proclaiming the rising of the moon.

"Shall you set out upon an expedition to-night?" asked Noakes, after a pause.

"Why?"

"I merely asked the question."

"Are you ready and willing to go?"

"Yes, quite."

"Then I am not."

"Not?"

"No. I don't intend to quit this place until——"

"Until when?"

"Until I have discovered what was the meaning of the appearance we saw last night."

"I expected that."

"And well you might. It would be absolute madness to think of taking our departure until we were acquainted with all the mysteries of this place. That is one of them—and one, too, that I am determined to clear up."

"And—and——"

"What?"

"If it should be a spectre—some supernatural being—some disembodied spirit?"

"Aha!"

"Why do you laugh?"

"At the idea of such a thing. Do you believe in them?"

"Do you disbelieve in them?"

Wild did not answer this question. He said:

"If there are such things as spectres, and this is one of them, I will face it to-night. If it harms me, well and good; if not, we shall be safe—perfectly safe."

"Why so?"

"Because, while a ghost pays visits to this mill, none of the villagers will have the courage to approach it."

This was very good reasoning on Wild's part, and so Mr. Noakes thought, though he did not admit it.

He was amazed at his companion's boldness and resolution.

When the moon rose, Wild stationed himself at one of the little loopholes, and bade his companion do the same.

"Now, then, keep watch," he said; "use your eyes well, and the moment you see the figure appear let me know."

They watched for a long time, but without any result.

At length, however, there came upon the silent air a faint, far-off sound.

Some village clock was striking, and the sounds were carried by the wind in the direction of the mill.

Jonathan counted the strokes.

"It is midnight," he said, "the church clock has just struck."

"Look—look!" cried Noakes, at the same instant. "It is there!"

Jonathan did look, and in the distance he perceived the singular white figure.

He recognised it instantly.

Over the meadows it swept, just as before, appearing to glide through the hedges as though it possessed no materiality.

But that might be only a visual delusion.

Wild thought so, when he remembered the easy manner

in which the disappearance through the doorway was accounted for.

His heart beat painfully, and his breath came thick and fast—but he was more excited than terrified.

Without deviating in the least degree from a straight line, and without either accelerating or retarding its speed, the spectre approached the mill.

When at no great distance from it, Jonathan touched his companion on the arm.

"Now," he said—"now is the time! Come!"

Noakes trembled.

But some portion of Wild's boldness seemed to reflect itself—so to speak—upon him.

He experienced also a great amount of curiosity.

"Be careful to tread noiselessly!" added Wild—"make no sound if you value your life!"

With these words, he lowered himself from the upper chamber in the mill.

As before, he lowered himself by the aid of the machinery, nor did he pause until he reached a spot at some height from the floor of the mill, and yet from which he could obtain a clear and uninterrupted view of the doorway.

The moon was shining in with even more precision than on the preceding night, and over the threshold of the door was a square patch of bright light.

"Hush!" said Wild, in a faint whisper—"hush!"

"I am still!" was the whispered reply.

"You see where the moonlight falls upon the flooring, revealing it so distinctly?"

"I do."

"Then observe that spot attentively. When the figure appears we shall be able to have a good look at it."

Both judged it imprudent to say more, and therefore they remained silent.

It was well they did so, for almost immediately afterwards the spectre appeared at the doorway.

As on the previous occasion, it paused on the little square landing-place, turning its back to the mill, and looking afar over the country, as one would think, in order to ascertain whether or not it was followed.

Then, apparently satisfied with the result of this observation, the figure turned slowly round.

It then faced the two men concealed in the mill.

But as the moon shone upon the back of the figure, it cast a deep shadow on the flooring, so that they were unable to perceive its countenance with any degree of distinctness.

The figure stepped forward about half a dozen paces, and then stopped.

It was now past the limit of the bright patch of light, but, by straining their eyes to the utmost, Wild and Noakes could both distinguish it.

The figure stood still.

Then a long, deep-drawn sigh made itself heard.

Noakes gave such a sudden and violent start when he heard it that he almost betrayed their hiding-place.

Jonathan continued to rivet his eyes upon it.

Then he saw the figure stoop down, and raise what seemed to be some heavy object.

What it was, Wild could not at first make out, though he understood a moment afterwards—not because he could see it, however, but because he remembered that the figure was pausing somewhere near the trap-door.

He believed it was the trap-door that had been raised.

All doubt upon this point was quickly set at rest.

The figure, after assuming something like a listening attitude, gradually lowered itself down until it disappeared entirely.

It should be stated that all these proceedings we unaccompanied by any kind of noise—indeed, up to the present moment everything that had occurred was confirmatory of the idea that it was some supernatural visitant to the mill.

Was it the unquiet spirit of the girl who had been so barbarously murdered there?

The figure, so far as Wild could tell, came over the field from the direction of the cottage in which the murdered girl dwelt.

It had ascended the steps by means of which alone admission to the mill could be gained.

With his own eyes he had seen it stoop and raise the trap-door—that trap-door through which, according to the confession of the murderer, her body had been cast,

that trap-door leading to the foundation of the mill from which her corpse had been recovered.

Certainly all these things pointed to one conclusion, and they were almost enough to convince anyone.

But Wild was not content to let the matter rest there.

He had seen so much in safety, and why should he not see more?

He pulled the skirt of Noakes's coat.

"What is it?"

"Descend."

Jonathan did not wait to give his companion the opportunity of disputing this command, but immediately lowered himself by the aid of the machinery.

For an instant Noakes hesitated.

He had two evils to choose between.

It was quite in opposition to his inclinations to follow Wild; it was also quite as repugnant to his feelings to remain where he was.

There was much—very much—in having the society and companionship of a man like Wild.

Certainly up to the present moment Jonathan had behaved with great courage, and his manner was well calculated to inspire confidence.

Therefore, after a brief hesitation, Mr. Noakes gently let himself down.

When his feet touched the floor he found Wild standing close to him.

"Come," he said. "I thought you meant to be an hour! Come carefully!"

Stepping on tiptoe, Wild made his way towards the trap-door.

Noakes followed in his footsteps.

In a little while they reached it.

Wild looked down.

He then became aware of one strange and singular fact.

After having raised the trap-door and made a partial examination of the place beneath, as we have already described, Jonathan Wild closed the trap-door again, leaving the floor of the mill just in the same condition as he had found it.

It was, therefore, with a start that he discovered the trap-door was lying wide open.

From this moment his courage increased.

Gently he knelt down.

Then lowering his head down the aperture he looked around him, or rather we should say, he tried to look, for he found nothing but the darkness of the tomb surrounding him.

The silence, too, was quite unbroken.

He remained in this position for at least a minute.

Then, in a very faint whisper, he said to his companion: "Follow me."

As he spoke he changed his position slightly, and lowered himself through the trap-door.

He seized fast hold of the edge of the flooring, and lowered himself until the full extent of his arms was reached.

Then he found his feet just touched the ground beneath.

He let go then, and stepped aside.

Noakes followed with the same caution, and with the same silence.

Then they stood side by side immovable, both straining their eyes and ears.

At length, Jonathan Wild perceived in one direction the faint glimmering of a light.

Confident of making some strange discovery now, he carefully stepped forward.

From his previous inspection of the place, he knew that the flooring—if we may so call it—was very uneven, and covered with many obstacles.

The least sound in that silent place would betray their presence.

In spite of the difficulties of such an undertaking, Wild and Noakes by making use of all the caution they could, managed to push forward for a considerable distance without a sound.

As they advanced, the light they had first beheld grew stronger and stronger, though, nevertheless, it was still very dim and faint.

There could be no doubt about its presence now though, as there was at first.

Presently they came in sight of a small square opening

in the flooring, such as would be produced by the removal of a trap-door.

It was from this square open space that the dim light ascended.

Redoubling their caution, the two villains crept forward.

To ensure greater silence, they stooped down and crept forward on their hands and feet.

By this mode of progression, the edge of the square opening was reached.

They glanced down it, first cautiously, for they could not tell whether they might not be immediately discovered.

But this fear soon vanished.

In a little while after, they ventured to creep still closer, and then to look down through the trap-door, by lowering their heads into the abyss beneath them.

They gave one hurried glance around, and then their gaze became riveted and concentrated upon one object.

It was indeed a singular scene which they beheld, and for several moments both remained perfectly immovable, gazing upon it.

CHAPTER DCXIV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES MAKE A STRANGE BUT PROFITABLE DISCOVERY IN THE OLD MILL.

It was a strange, irregular, cavernous-like place into which they looked.

The sides and ground were composed of clay, hammered hard and flat.

Its dimensions were limited, and the roof was rudely vaulted.

At the farther extremity was seated a man on the ground.

Beside him was burning a small piece of candle, which gave out a very feeble light.

Near him was a mass of something white.

By the aid of the candle, they saw that this man presented many appearances of extreme old age.

He was tall and very thin.

His face, upon which the light of the candle seemed to shine with greater distinctness than any other object, was perfectly white in colour—so white as to be painful and disagreeable to look upon.

But it was the manner in which this man was occupied that absorbed so much the attention of Wild and Noakes.

Well might their gaze be fixed upon him.

Well might their eyes burn brightly and avariciously.

On the ground was a pile of glittering gold coins—how many, it was hard to say.

The old man was intently occupied in counting them one by one, weighing each piece in his hand carefully, and looking at it wistfully and half affectionately.

Then he would consign it to a small bag he held in one hand.

And so he proceeded, being entirely wrapped up in his occupation.

At length the bag was full, and then, using much gentleness and care, he secured it at the mouth, tying the string tightly in a knot.

Then he placed this bag along with several others.

Oh, how delighted Noakes was when he saw this sight!

He looked upon every bit of the treasure as his own.

With so much wealth, Jonathan would no longer hesitate about leaving England; then he would be at rest.

They watched the old man for a long time, until almost all the gold had been counted over.

In perfect silence the old man continued his occupation, and but for an occasional clink of one coin against another, they might have believed that all they saw was a mere phantasm.

But slowly and silently Jonathan Wild raised himself up.

With perfect noiselessness he swung his feet over the edge of the trap-door, and lowered himself.

The distance to the ground was so short that he could touch it without letting go, and therefore he reached the vault without the old man at the further end being aware of the presence of an intruder.

The sight of the glittering gold had a marvellous effect upon Mr. Noakes's courage.

Without waiting for any signal from his companion, he followed him quickly, and stood by his side.

Wild smiled grimly, and then crept forward like a tiger.

But something or other at this moment made the old man sensible that he was not alone.

He turned round.

When he beheld two men of such a ferocious aspect as Wild and Noakes, he uttered a loud scream.

"Lost—lost!" he cried—"all is lost—lost! The gold I have so toiled for will be wrested from me! But not without a struggle—not without a struggle!"

Uttering these words, he precipitated himself upon Wild and Noakes, and a desperate encounter immediately ensued.

Mr. Noakes was quite as barbarous a villain as Jonathan Wild; the only difference was, that one had more boldness than the other.

On this occasion, however, the ex-Governor seemed quite changed.

With great ferocity he drew a clasp-knife from his pocket, and stabbed the old man repeatedly with it.

It was wonderful to see how the miser withstood so many blows.

All at once, however, his strength forsook him, and he fell down upon the floor of the vault, quite dead.

Jonathan looked at his companion in surprise.

"You have found your courage," he ejaculated. "But you have been rather too hasty."

"How so?"

"I meant to have extracted some information from him. But, however, it doesn't signify—it's of little importance."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes, quite, I think."

"Then come on—let us count this gold."

For once in his life, Mr. Noakes led the way.

"You see," cried Jonathan, "what sort of a pass things would come to if you had your own way."

"What do you mean?"

"If you had the direction of affairs."

"How so?"

"Why, last night, when we saw that ghost, as you thought it, you were anxious to be gone, and, but for my resolute manner, you would never have come near this place again."

"Well, say no more about that now; I am glad things have turned out as they have."

"But it is worth while to refer to it," continued Wild. "Bear it in mind, and on another occasion be guided by me."

"I fancy you guessed what was the meaning of this mysterious appearance."

"Perhaps I did."

As he spoke, Jonathan Wild stooped down and picked up a large white sheet.

"It is easy enough to play the ghost," he said, as he wound it round him. "A little whitening on my face, and then I should look quite like a character."

"It was a good notion, was it not?" asked Noakes, as he untied one of the bags and began to count the coin it contained.

"You mean to personate the ghost?"

"Yes."

"Well, it has ended badly for the old miser, for such he undoubtedly was."

"Well for us."

"Truly, as you say, well for us."

"Help me to count this gold."

"It's a pleasant task, and I don't mind assisting you."

Jonathan then seated himself beside his companion and for several minutes not another word was said.

Both were occupied in counting.

They found there was a hole in the flooring of the vault over which a plank fitted, and on the top of this plank the miser was in the habit of placing earth, and patting it down so that the existence of the hiding-place would never be suspected by anyone.

One by one the bags were reached out from it and counted over.

Each little bag contained fifty guineas, and there were twenty-one bags, so that by this stroke of good luck the two villains found themselves in possession of more than a thousand pounds.

"A few more such lucky strokes as this," said Wild, as

he placed the board over the hiding-place—"a few more such strokes, and our purpose will be achieved."

"A few more?" said Noakes. "Is not this sufficient?"

"Can you ask such a question? A thousand pounds—why, what is it?—a mere nothing. I tell you," he added, gnashing his teeth together, "that I had nearly twenty-five thousand pounds deposited in the bank."

"But you cannot hope to obtain so much as that again."

"No, no, I am well aware of that; but still, we are here and in safety; we have made a good beginning, and to add to our store will be easy enough. I will be content when we have managed to get together something like eight or ten thousand pounds. That will keep us both comfortable in some foreign land."

Noakes shook his head and groaned.

"Go with this," he said, "and be content! I know it—I feel sure of it—you will wait until the time for going has passed by; you will wish then that you had taken my advice!"

"Stop!" said Wild—"not another word more in that strain! I will not listen!"

"But how do you intend to proceed?"

"As I told you, the gold we have just become possessed of will be safe enough in its old hiding-place. We will leave the vault, and shut down the trap-door. When we have obtained any more booty, we will add it to that which is here; and, as I have promised, when we have got a sufficient amount we will set sail."

"You will never have enough!"

"I have mentioned the amount, and what is it? If fortune favours us we may obtain what I require in a week or a fortnight at the most; then another week will see us in safety. Come, leave this place now—I cannot bear to stay in it—it sickens me—it smells of blood!"

To reach the trap-door, Jonathan had to step over the body of the miser.

He had shrunk from doing this, and only accomplished it by closing his eyes.

As soon as he had passed through the opening, however, his courage revived.

"Now, Noakes," he exclaimed, "are you coming? You had better make haste while you have the chance, or damme if I don't shut the door down and starve you to death—you will have enough of your gold then!"

Evidently Mr. Noakes thought this a threat not to be despised.

He knew the disposition of his companion well, and was fully sensible how unwise it was to aggravate him, so, with great alacrity, he scrambled out of the opening.

But Jonathan Wild paused, and exclaimed:

"Wait a moment—I must reflect!"

"About what?"

"Several things. In the first place, there's that old man."

"What of him?"

"I don't suppose it is known that he was in the habit of personating a ghost on the occasion of his visits to the mill, nor do I suppose it ever will be known; but his absence will be noticed."

Noakes started.

"True!" he said. "In my excitement I did not think of that, nor of the consequences that would probably arise from it."

"Nor I, until this moment. Who he is, of course we know not; but that he resided somewhere near at hand we may safely conclude."

"And—and—"

"What?"

"What steps do you think would be taken when his disappearance is discovered?"

"That is hard to say."

"Will you listen to my advice?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, then, let us quit this place at once. That will put an end to the difficulty."

"Not so," said Jonathan—"not so! I fully and entirely believe that this old mill will form a place of refuge for us for some time to come—that is, if we are only careful."

"I thought so too. But if they search for the old man—"

"Yes, that's just the difficulty."

"What shall you do, then?"

"I am trying to think. As soon as ever the miser's

disappearance is discovered, the people will remember all about the appearance of the ghost at the mill. They will connect the two events together, and probably may come and search this place."

"As they did for the girl we heard about."

"Just so."

"The danger is great."

"I am inclined to think so, and yet it will not be so serious, after all. This old man may have lived entirely alone, and his disappearance will not be noticed for a long while."

"But suppose it should, what then?"

"I can think of nothing better than playing the ghost myself. I will undertake to scare away anyone who approaches this spot; and the more I think of it, the more I am inclined to think that this, after all, is the best thing to do."

"It is full of danger."

"Bah! You are always prating upon that one word! Let it be decided that, until we can think of something better, we will be the ghosts, and scare away intruders."

"As you will."

"Then—then—" stammered Wild.

"Then what?"

"Then you may as well descend into the vault again, and fetch the sheet that lies in yonder corner. I can't play the ghost without it."

Mr. Noakes regarded his companion doubtfully.

"Do you hear?" said Wild again. "Be quick and fetch it!"

"No—no; I'll be d—d if I do! Jonathan Wild, I know you pretty well, and I am obliged to keep a sharp eye on all your actions. No doubt it would suit you very well to get me down there on that pretext, and then you would close the trap-door and leave me to my fate! No, no, Jonathan Wild! If you want that sheet, you may fetch it yourself, for may I be d—d if I fetch it for you!"

CHAPTER DCXV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES ARE ALARMED AT HEARING AN APPROACHING FOOTSTEP.

MR. NOAKES folded his arms in a very resolute way as he spoke these words.

"You defy me, then?" said Jonathan, after a pause.

"I do defy you, if refusing to descend is defiance. I say again, if you want the sheet, fetch it!"

"And," replied Wild, with a hideous grin, "what guarantee have I that if I go down, you will not carry out that pleasant little idea of shutting down the trap-door?"

"It was you that first suggested it."

"I know I did—but I was only in jest."

"So was I."

"You shall repent this," said Wild. "I have borne with you so far; but I would advise you not to tempt me too much. I will show you how much contempt I feel for you and all you may do!"

As he spoke, Jonathan leaped down into the vault, and hastened to the corner where the sheet had been placed.

For a moment the idea that he might get rid of his hateful associate at once and for ever, by closing the trap-door, occurred to Mr. Noakes; but his previous attempts upon Wild had been failures, and the recollection of this made him tremble and hesitate, until the chance was lost.

It took Wild but a few seconds to obtain the article he required, and he soon scrambled through the trap-door again.

He had brought with him, besides the sheet, the small piece of candle.

He gave this to his companion, and then closed the trap-door.

He found it fitted perfectly into its place.

All round about was a quantity of loose rubbish.

From the appearance of this, it was evident that the miser was in the habit of covering it over the trap-door, thus making the chances of discovery less.

This Jonathan Wild proceeded to do.

Having completed all his arrangements in this respect, he returned to the other trap-door.

Having reached it, he judged it prudent to extinguish the light, and he did so.

He then drew himself up, and assisted his companion.

This trap-door was also closed silently.

"Brandy—brandy!" muttered Wild, as he rose to his full height. "I want more brandy, especially after this night's work."

"Hush!" said Noakes.

"What is it?"

"Hark! I thought I heard something."

Jonathan stopped and was on the alert instantly.

His keen ears then detected a faint creaking sound.

"It's only the wind," he whispered—"only the wind blowing against some of the loose timbers."

"No, no!" said Noakes.

Wild listened again.

He trembled a little and felt uneasy, for plainly enough he could distinguish a footstep.

It was a slow, heavy, and deliberate footstep.

Some one was ascending the wooden steps.

And this was the cause of the creaking which had first attracted Noakes's attention.

In great uncertainty and surprise, both villains waited to see what would next ensue.

But for a brief time we must leave them, and, in order that what follows may be fully understood, conduct the reader to the little public-house where Wild and Noakes had stopped.

On the preceding evening, as on that occasion, a number of people, mostly regular customers, were seated in the tap-room.

As before, the conversation turned upon the subject of ghosts.

"I tell you I've seen it!" said one—"I will swear to it upon the Bible any minute, I saw it!"

"When?"

"Why, to-night."

"But at what time?"

"About an hour ago."

"Are you sure, Stephen," asked one, "that your fancy did not deceive you?"

"My fancy? Aha! that's a good joke! The idea, now, of my fancy deceiving me!"

"But let us hear all about it!" said another. "I am getting sick and tired of this ghost talk! Nothing else is spoken of night after night; but I don't believe a single word of it!"

"Then," said the one who was called Giles, "don't you believe that I saw the ghost to-night?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, then, I tell you I have."

"Hear, hear! Order, order!" cried several voices.

"Let Giles tell what he has to say!"

"Well, I will, if you'll only listen."

"Go on, then."

"Well, when I was on the top of the hill just beyond, I happened to be thinking of Stubbs's mill, and so I turned round to have a look at it. You know you can see Stubbs's mill from the top of the hill, can you not?"

"Yes, yes!" said several voices in chorus.

"You can see it plain enough when it's a dark night; but it was not a dark night—it was a very light night: the moon was shining brighter than I ever saw it shine before—I could see everything."

"Well, well," said the one who disbelieved in ghosts, "just let us know what you did see."

"Well, then, as I tell you, I just turned my head, when, to my surprise and fear too—and I am not ashamed to say it—I saw a tall white figure go gliding over the meadow towards the mill."

"You saw that?"

"I did."

"Will you swear to it?"

"On the Bible, any minute."

"Don't interrupt," said another voice. "Go on, Giles!"

"Well, I have not got much more to say; but I saw the ghost go up the steps that lead to the door of the mill as plainly as I can see any of you now; and when it got to the top it entered, and I saw it no more."

The disbeliever looked puzzled.

"Well, Enoch," said one, addressing him, "what do you think of it now?"

"Why, I am just in the same mind as I was at first, for Giles has dreamt or fancied it, or else he has mistaken



[BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD, DISGUISED, SET OUT IN QUEST OF JONATHAN WILD.]

something for a ghost, which last I take it is most likely."

"Well, would you like to watch for it to-morrow night and satisfy yourself?"

"I should not mind that, only I don't care about waiting so long—I am impatient. I want to settle the matter at once, so I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What—what?"

"You said you saw the ghost enter the mill, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Then probably the ghost is in there still."

"Most likely."

"Well, then, I will bet you all glasses of brandy round that I will go out, walk straight to the mill, up the steps, and into it; and to prove to you that I am as good as my word, I will bring away either a piece of wood, or a fragment of iron or stonework, which you will recognise as belonging to the machinery in the mill."

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"No—no, Enoch," cried several—"don't think of doing anything so foolish! You will live to repent it! It's tempting Providence!"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Enoch, boldly. "I don't believe there are any such things as ghosts, and if there are I am not afraid of them, and shouldn't be of a whole regiment. You can please yourselves whether you take my bet or not, but, if I come back without doing what I have said, I will pay for glasses round for all of you."

So saying, Enoch, who was a sturdy young ploughman, fixed his hat firmly on his head, and grasped his oaken cudgel with an air of resolution.

"And are you really going?" said several.

"I am. I don't intend to have all the village frightened by an old woman's tale."

"Well, then," cried the guests, "if you are going, we will go too."

"No you won't—at least, not along with me. I should

have no chance of seeing the ghost then, for it's a very odd thing a ghost never appears to two people at once."

"But we should like to see you go, Enoch."

"Perhaps you wouldn't believe me without," was the reply, "and think this was all idle boasting? Well, to prove it is not, I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What?"

"You shall walk with me to the top of the hill, and there stop. I will then walk on by myself. You will be able to see me easy enough, for, look, the moon is shining bright enough now."

He pointed to the window as he spoke.

"Well, well—come on, then!" they all cried, as they finished their glasses.

They hurriedly left the inn, very much to the surprise of the landlord.

"Well—well," he cried, "no man ever had such a set of customers as I have! But no matter! They're gone, that's one comfort, and I'll be off to-bed. I will let them know they can't run in and out of my house when they think proper! Not a drop more does anybody get to-night!"

Accordingly, the landlord of the inn fastened the door in a somewhat ferocious manner.

He was very independent was that landlord.

But it was in consequence of a monopoly that he enjoyed.

There was not another public-house within six miles of where he dwelt, so that he was able to treat the people very much as he liked in consequence.

It is not with him, however, but with his customers that we have now to do.

With an easy, confident step, Enoch walked along the moonlit road, followed closely by an irregular throng of people, who seemed to borrow some courage from him.

Without accident, the top of the hill was reached.

Then Enoch, turning round, said:

"Stop—stop here, all of you. There lies the old mill. You can see it plainly. Stand here and watch me. You will see me go up the steps and inside. I shan't be a moment, then you will see how groundless all your superstitions are."

"We'll wait—we'll wait!" they cried.

And upon receiving this assurance, Enoch sprang lightly over the fence, and walked briskly towards the mill.

There was no hurry perceptible in his movements, nor was there a symptom of hanging back.

He walked on with a firm, confident air, as though he was quite at his ease.

His companions all held their breaths as they watched him cross the meadow.

He sprang over the low hedgerow dividing the fields, and was soon seen within a very short distance of the mill.

The excitement then reached its height.

So intense did it become, that the villagers, disregarding the injunctions which had been laid upon them, crept forward a few paces at a time after Enoch, and, rendered bold by their numbers, came quite close to the hedge that surrounded the field in which the mill stood.

Enoch never once looked behind him, so he was ignorant of this circumstance.

Bold as he was, he could not help feeling somewhat nervous and excited when he got near the building.

There was something strange and solemn about the old place, and the broken sails creaked dismally as they were shaken by the wind.

At no great distance on his right hand was a blackened, decayed stump.

He knew full well what it was.

It was the remains of the gibbet to which the murderer's body had been suspended.

He began to feel an oppression of his breast, and the blood seemed to circulate languidly through his veins when he placed his foot on the bottom step.

Just then he looked back, and saw that his companions were only about fifty yards behind him.

Angry that they should have disobeyed him and crept so close, he shook his stick threateningly at them.

They understood the gesture.

But he need not have troubled himself about the matter.

The villagers had already approached the mill as closely as their courage would let them.

Seeing them pause, Enoch was satisfied.

He turned round, and began to ascend the steps.

CHAPTER DCXVI.

ENOCH IS TERRIFIED BY THE APPEARANCE OF THE SPECTRE IN THE HAUNTED MILL.

BREATHLESS, the villagers watched him, marvelling how he could have the courage to venture into such a place alone.

Although there were many singular sensations in his breast—sensations which he had never before felt—Enoch, assuming all the fortitude he could, went boldly on until he stood on the little landing-place.

Just then a faint, smothered groan struck upon his ears.

It was distinctly audible, and he could not take refuge in the thought that his own fancy had deceived him.

"I am growing terrified at nothing," he muttered. "Such a thing as that could easily be produced by the wind rushing through some narrow space."

In spite of his philosophy, however, Enoch's cheeks were bloodless.

With a very slow, hesitating step, he crossed the threshold of the mill.

He glanced apprehensively from side to side.

The moon was shining in with full force.

It illuminated in a peculiar manner the rusty and dilapidated machinery.

Shaking off to some extent the kind of nightmare which weighed upon his movements, Enoch strode forward with the intention of carrying back to his companions some object which he could exhibit as a trophy of his success.

But for the second time he heard that dismal groaning sound.

He stopped.

Had his life depended upon it, he could not have moved a single limb.

His heart knocked violently against his ribs, almost suffocating him.

Then suddenly there glided out into the patch of moonlight that lay upon the floor of the mill a horrible-looking figure.

It was clothed from head to foot in some white, flowing garment, which looked like a winding-sheet.

The face was ghastly white, and streaked with blood.

On the winding sheet, also, were spots of the same sanguine hue.

Enoch felt all his joints stiffen with horror.

All his scepticism was gone.

He would have given the world and all it contained for the power to then and there turn round and fly.

But a dreadful kind of fascination compelled him to keep his eyes riveted upon the spectre.

He tried to call aloud for help.

He knew that his companions were at no great distance, and that, if he raised his voice, they would surely hear him.

But he could not move his lips in the least, nor could he give utterance to so much as a faint whisper.

How long he stood gazing on the horrible apparition before him he knew not; probably only for a few seconds, though to him it seemed an age.

Then the finishing stroke was put to his terror.

Slowly and with apparent difficulty, the spectre raised one arm, and pointed to him with threatening gesture.

At the same time the dismal, smothered groan again smote upon his ears.

Either the movement or the sound broke the spell that had frozen his faculties.

Uttering a loud yell of fear, which awakened a thousand echoes in the old mill, Enoch turned round, and rushed blindly out at the door.

In his terror he was either careless or forgetful of the fact that a steep flight of steps had to be descended.

He rushed forward, and then rolled down until he reached the ground with a crash.

Then, scrambling to his feet, and uttering cries of fear, he ran at full speed across the meadow, endeavouring to overtake his companions.

But this was quite in vain.

At the first note of alarm—at the first intimation that something was amiss—what little courage the villagers possessed evaporated.

With common consent they turned round, and ran towards the highway at a breakneck rate.

Enoch ran after them, screaming and shouting like one possessed.

Away they went up the hill, along the highway, until finally they arrived in front of the public-house.

The doors and shutters were closed, and from none of the windows beamed forth a light.

The landlord and his household had retired to rest.

They hammered loudly for admittance.

Never before in the whole course of their lives had they felt so much in need of some powerful and artificial stimulant.

While they were thus engaged, Enoch reached them.

He was gasping for breath, and seemed as though about to sink to the ground.

"What have you seen, Enoch—what have you seen?"

He made several frantic gestures.

"Tell us—tell us!" they shouted.

Their alarm increased by his mysterious behaviour.

"Do you believe in ghosts now?"

He nodded his head quickly, and then managed to gasp out:

"I have seen one!"

At this declaration, although they fully expected it, the villagers drew back.

Then the landlord, hearing the disturbance, appeared at one of the upper windows, and demanded to know what was amiss.

"Let us in," they cried—"let us in! We are terrified to death! The old mill is haunted, and Enoch has seen the ghost!"

The landlord's first impulse was to shut down the window and return to rest.

But other considerations prompted him to change his resolution.

Not the least of them was a powerful curiosity to know what had happened, and what Enoch had seen.

He knew him to be a man of greater courage than his neighbours, and one not at all likely to yield himself up to superstitious influences.

If he heard Enoch himself say that he had seen a ghost, he should no longer doubt the existence of one.

Moreover, after such terror as that, no inconsiderable quantity of strong liquors would be imbibed.

Therefore, hastily slipping on his apparel, he descended the stairs and allowed the villagers to enter.

At first he found himself entirely occupied in attending to the wants of his numerous guests; but when each had a glass of something hot and strong before him, he sat down near the fire and anxiously demanded an explanation.

By this time his customers had also to some degree recovered their composure.

But Enoch sat by himself, trembling and shaking as though suffering from an ague.

His lips moved convulsively, and his eyes rolled wildly in their sockets.

Then, in compliance with their demands, he gave them a clear though somewhat exaggerated statement of all he had seen.

He was questioned closely as to the sex of the ghostly visitant, but about this he could form no definite opinion.

"We shall hear more of this," said the landlord; "this is only the beginning. Who can tell? Perhaps some other deed of blood has been perpetrated in the mill!"

This was a supposition that found a home in the breast of every one of his auditors.

"We'll search the mill," they said—"we will certainly search it to-morrow; we will call in the aid of the magistrates, as they did when they found the body of Polly Powell!"

The discussion was continued for a considerable length of time, but without the elucidation of any fresh fact.

It was, however, finally resolved upon that the whole body there assembled, the landlord and Enoch included, should wait upon the magistrates and request a warrant to be issued, and a special force organised to search the mill thoroughly in every part.

It was nearly morning when they separated, and then in a few moments the tidings spread all over the village.

Faithful to their intention, they waited upon the magistrates.

Enoch having by this time recovered from his alarm,

gave so plain and circumstantial an account of what he had beheld, that it was scarcely possible to believe that he had been deluded by his fancy.

Moreover, there was the former case, which served as a kind of precedent.

The magistrates, like the rest, thought it not unlikely that a murderous crime had been committed in the old mill, and made the inquiry whether anyone was missing.

In a small community like that the absence of one was quickly noted.

No one had disappeared, and the answer was given accordingly.

"We will wait for three days," said the magistrates. "If by the end of that time we find any person is absent, and if, in the meanwhile, the spectre is seen again, we will have the mill thoroughly searched from the roof to its foundations."

With this assurance the villagers left them.

But there was no work done by any of them, and in a little while the excitement had reached its highest possible pitch.

But for the present we will leave the villagers to talk over these mysterious events, and wait with impatience for the three days to elapse, while we return to the proceedings of Jonathan Wild and his companion.

CHAPTER DCXVII.

JONATHAN WILD, FOR ONCE IN HIS LIFE, PAYS ATTENTION TO THE ADVICE OF MR. NOAKES.

WHEN we last left those two worthies, it was, as will doubtless be remembered, when they were filled with alarm by hearing an approaching footstep.

They had stopped in doubt, and, straining their ears, had distinctly heard a heavy footstep ascending the flight of wooden steps.

This was Enoch.

Jonathan Wild, by a species of intuition, was able to give a very shrewd guess as to the actual state of affairs.

Such being the state of affairs, it did not take him a second to resolve upon a certain plan of operations.

He still held the miser's sheet in his arms, and now he wrapped it carefully around him.

It was stained with blood in many places, which had flowed from the wounds of its late owner, but this made it all the better for Jonathan's purpose.

In climbing up through the trap-door, Jonathan had scratched one of his fingers rather severely.

From this trifling wound blood flowed profusely, and he wiped his hands repeatedly over his face, thus imparting to it the terrible appearance which so alarmed the intruder.

Then, as we have already stated, Jonathan glided out into the moonlight, having first given utterance to those two dismal groans.

He was amply satisfied with the result of this experiment.

He witnessed the alarm of Enoch with great glee, and when he heard him fall with so much violence from the top of the stairs to the bottom he could have screamed aloud with laughter.

Prudence, however, restrained him, and he was silent.

He crept cautiously, however, to the door of the mill, and so did Mr. Noakes.

Then they peeped forth, taking care to do so in such a manner that there was no fear of their being seen by those without.

"Have I not managed this business well?" said Wild, in a triumphant voice, as he divested himself of the white sheet. "It will be a long while before those yokels recover from the fright which this has given them."

"I hope it will, Mr. Wild."

"There is no need to hope—it is certain to have that effect; I am confident of it."

"But I was afraid—"

"You always are afraid."

"I say," continued Mr. Noakes, "that I was afraid the result of such a course would be to raise such a general alarm as to cause the mill to be searched, then, doubtless we should be discovered, and the treasure as well."

"Always croaking evil!"

"I am, if you call that doing so."

"What do you call it?"

"Being prepared for the worst."

"Why, let the worst come!" said Wild. "I care not!"
 "But think now," continued Mr. Noakes—"have you done wisely?"

"Do you mean in frightening those fellows?"

"Yes; not only in that, but also in leaving the treasure where it is?"

"In what other place should you like it to be?"

"That I have not thought about at present. But do you remember the particulars of the story we heard at the inn?"

"Of course I do."

"Very well, then."

"To what do you refer?"

"To that part where the old man stated that, after seeing the spectre, the mill was searched."

"And you think that after what they have seen to-night the mill will be searched again?"

"It is quite possible, is it not, since it has been done before?"

"It is; but let them search—I care not!"

"But I do. Suppose we should be able to elude them, it is quite possible that they may be successful in discovering the trap-door."

"Which trap-door?"

"Not this one in the flooring—of course, the existence of that is already known."

"You mean the one below?"

"I do."

"I am not afraid that they will discover it."

"Yet they could do so."

"Well, let them."

"If they did, they would discover the body of the miser."

"Well, and what if they did?—they would not discover the treasure, would they?"

"I don't know."

"Is it not well secreted beneath those boards?"

"It is, I admit. But would not those who found the old man know his character as a miser?"

"In all probability, yes."

"Then, finding him in such a place as that, would they not be likely to search everywhere, under the belief that they should find some of his wealth hidden not far away?"

"Very true," said Wild, reflectively—"they might!"

"And if their attention was directed in that quarter," continued Noakes, "would they not be likely to discover the secret board?"

"I don't think they would."

"But let me ask you," said Noakes,—"*do you consider the treasure safe? Answer me that question.*"

"It is, probably, as safe there as it could be anywhere."

"I do not agree with you."

"Where would you have it put?"

"I tell you I have not thought of that."

"No, you never do—you always raise up and make a host of difficulties, but never show the way out of them."

"I leave that to you."

"But if we secreted the gold anywhere else in the mill it would be just as likely to be discovered in the event of a search being made."

"Then why secrete it in the mill at all?"

"Because of the danger of going outside."

"It is trifling, I think. Why not avail yourself of the fright you have just given the villagers? Depend upon it, not one of them will think of coming within sight of this place to-night. Suppose, then, that we occupy our time in fetching the gold up and hiding it in the meadow? In the event of our wanting it at any future time, we should be able to obtain it much more easily."

"That's true again," said Wild; "and, for once in a way, I will give you credit for having thought of a good thing. Do you hear that, Noakes?"

"I do."

"Well, then, your arguments have, this time, had due weight with me. Come along—we'll fetch the treasure up and bury it in the meadow, as you suggest."

Jonathan Wild was obliged to confess that this was a very good arrangement, and he blamed himself exceedingly for not having thought of it before.

He would gladly have deprived his companion of the credit of suggesting the best course of action.

Mr. Noakes gladly enough followed Wild down into the foundations of the mill again, although he knew full well such a frightful sight awaited them in the vault.

But, as we have previously said, the desire to get out of England in the shortest possible space of time was the ruling passion at that time in Mr. Noakes's breast.

He would have shrunk at nothing, however desperate, provided he could have been sure beforehand that it would have the desired result.

Therefore, whatever fears he might have felt at venturing into the vault again where the body of his murdered victim lay, were kept in abeyance by this one powerful impulse.

They little thought when they took so many precautions to cover the trap-door over with rubbish, that they should so soon have occasion to raise it again.

But so it was.

Both of them trembled and shook, and turned pale when they entered the vault.

But it was only a momentary feeling, and quickly wore off.

They strode over the dead body, turned up the earth that covered the boards beneath where the treasure was concealed, and then loaded themselves with as many of the bags as they could conveniently carry.

These they placed for the present just outside the edge of the trap-door.

When, at length, every bag had been removed from its resting-place, they, with extreme delight, quitted the vault, and fastened down the trap-door.

Both inwardly determined that nothing should ever induce them to enter the dismal place.

The removal of the treasure to the ground floor of the mill was safely and speedily accomplished.

Then, going to the landing-place we have so frequently mentioned, they reconnoitred cautiously.

But not a single sign of any individual could they see.

Fully impressed with the belief that they had the place entirely to themselves, and that no eye could possibly observe their movements, they cautiously threw the bags out at the door one by one, causing them to fall in the deep shadow which the mill cast.

They then descended.

But out of this shadow they did not venture to go, yet they got as far away from the mill as they could.

"See here," said Wild. "In case we should ever forget, or be in doubt about the exact spot where this money is hidden, just notice this: A few moments since I heard the church clock strike two. The moon is now one day past the full at this hour. You see, she casts a shadow of the mill just as you now behold it. Just under the shadow of that singular roof we will dig a hole and bury the money."

"All right, Mr. Wild; but you need not feel afraid that I shall forget the whereabouts of this spot."

Jonathan then dug a deep hole in the ground, into which the bags were carefully placed, all but one, which they retained to serve their present necessities.

Every care was taken by Jonathan to restore the spot to its original appearance, so that no one should have the least suspicion that the ground had been disturbed.

CHAPTER DCXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES COMMIT A BURGLARY.

WHEN this task was completed to the satisfaction of both, they returned to the mill.

Here a long consultation was held.

"Brandy!" said Wild—"I must and will have brandy! I cannot live without it, and I will obtain some at all risks!"

"And food!" said Noakes. "We cannot remain here without food. It is true we had a good meal at the inn, but that's a many hours ago; and when are we to obtain another?"

"That I can't tell. Not to-night, I fear."

"But when?"

"To-morrow."

"And why not now?"

"Because the village will be thoroughly alarmed—everyone will be on the look-out. We must wait and do the best we can until to-morrow night, and then we must

set out in good time, and obtain such a stock of provisions as will last us for several days."

To this Mr. Noakes was forced to consent.

If Jonathan thought it dangerous to make the attempt, it was not likely that he would have the courage to think of doing it himself, and so, discontentedly and miserably enough, the remainder of the night was passed.

During the whole of the next day, too, they were compelled to fast, and by evening were in truly a famishing condition.

The effects of long abstinence were visible in both of them.

Their courage also was wrought up to the highest pitch.

It was the courage that is felt by birds of prey when they have been deprived for a length of time of sustenance.

Jonathan had for so long been in the habit of keeping up his strength with stimulants that he suffered severely whenever he was deprived of them.

Eventually, however, to their great satisfaction, night came.

They waited until past the midnight hour, and then, taking advantage of the darkness, quitted the mill, and made their way over the fields, towards the village.

Although he had so much time to reflect, Jonathan had not decided upon any particular plan of operations, nor could he tell them exactly how the provisions he required were to be obtained.

Creeping cautiously on, they came, at length, opposite to the inn where they had previously taken up their quarters.

While they remained concealed behind the hedge looking at it they saw a throng of people emerge.

Then the doors were closed and fastened, and the lights extinguished.

According to his custom, the landlord had turned out his customers.

The subject of the ghost had been talked threadbare.

Moreover, he was anxious to make up for the rest he had lost on the preceding night.

As soon as the villagers were out of sight, Noakes said:

"What do you intend to do now?"

"I have just been thinking," was the reply.

"And what is the result?"

"I have almost made up my mind to wait here patiently a little while longer, until the inmates of the public-house have had time to get fairly to sleep."

"And then what?"

"To creep round to the back of the premises—make our way in, in the best way we can, and carry off provisions and brandy enough to last us."

"We cannot obtain brandy elsewhere."

"True enough!" growled Wild. "And as I can't do without it, that's why I have made up my mind to run the risk of entering the inn."

Mr. Noakes was rendered so desperate by the pangs of hunger that he raised not a single objection to the proposal thus made by his companion.

Indeed, he was impatient to make the attack; but Wild had the prudence to wait a reasonable time—until, in fact, all had gone to sleep.

He counted much upon the previous night's excitement, and believed that they would sleep all the more soundly in consequence.

At last, when nearly an hour had elapsed, he said:

"The time has come now, Noakes. Forward—and back me up in what I do!"

"Never fear—I will do that!"

Without another word, Jonathan jumped over the hedge, which was a very low one, and, crossing the road, speedily crept round to the back part of the inn.

Then, scaling a wall, he dropped down in a large yard.

Keeping under the shadow of the building, he crawled gently onwards.

He did not anticipate much trouble in carrying out his design.

In such a lonely place as that, burglars would not be common, and therefore he did not expect to find any of those precautions taken that would be in a town.

Coming presently to a window that was unprotected with a shutter, he paused.

Taking his knife out of his pocket, he determined to make the attempt to enter by this quarter.

The window was a small one, and of very primitive construction.

The blade of Wild's knife proved quite sufficient to undo the simple fastening, and then the window was open.

It was so small that it was not thought worth securing in any other way.

Wild crawled through the window hastily, and then, in a tone of great satisfaction, he said to his companion:

"Follow—come!"

Mr. Noakes did so, and then discovered that by great good luck they had managed to enter the place they most of all wished to reach.

This was the pantry, or larder.

On the shelves they saw plenty of provisions; but before going any farther they made a desperate onslaught upon them.

Then they packed up as much as they thought they could conveniently carry.

Only one more thing was required, and then their expedition was accomplished.

This was the brandy, and this Mr. Noakes was quite willing to forgo.

But not so Jonathan Wild.

That was to him more necessary than even food.

So, disregarding his companion's remonstrances, he forced open the pantry door.

He was then fairly inside the public-house.

A perfect silence reigned all around, showing that no alarm had as yet been given.

This inspired them with confidence, for if they only continued the same caution that they had hitherto observed, they would be able to retire without leaving a single clue behind them.

Jonathan prowled about until he discovered the door leading into the bar.

This was the place where the brandy would be found.

With great skill, considering how unprovided he was with the necessary tools, this door was forced open, scarcely any noise being made by the operation.

On a shelf they found a bottle about three-parts full of brandy.

Jonathan put it to his lips and allowed the liquid to gurgle down his throat at a terrible rate.

Then he handed it to his companion, who drank but sparingly.

Jonathan seized the bottle again, and this time did not take it from his lips until it was empty.

"Now," he said, "we must look elsewhere! Brandy I must and will have!"

There was a door in the bar, which, from its situation, Jonathan concluded led down to the cellar.

If this should prove a correct surmise, he would, doubtless, be able to find a small keg of his favourite liquor.

It was only necessary to turn the handle to open this door, and then the rush of cold air that blew upon his face sufficed to show him that his conjecture was correct.

They descended the steps, and, after what seemed to Mr. Noakes to be an unreasonably long time, a small barrel was found.

From its size and weight it evidently contained spirits, though whether it was brandy they had no means of telling.

It was something though that would do as a substitute, and therefore Jonathan was content.

By the same route as they had entered they made their way out of the building.

Jonathan carried the keg, and Mr. Noakes burdened himself with the provisions.

They had the good fortune to get back to the mill without the occurrence of any accident.

Jonathan was careful to look about him on all sides, and felt tolerably confident that he had not been seen by a single individual.

On their return, the two villains had a feast, and made up for the time they had been compelled to go without food.

The keg was rudely tapped, and, to Jonathan Wild's joy, he found that it really did contain brandy.

So assiduously did he devote himself to the spirits, that he dropped off at length in an insensible state, leaving Mr. Noakes to keep watch, which he did in fear and trembling.

He dreaded the morning to come, lest when the robbery was discovered they should be suspected.

He found it hard to resist going to sleep, and every now and then the silence would draw him off into a doze.

Then with a start he would awake, and for several minutes be a prey to such terror as was surely no inconsiderable punishment for the crimes he had committed.

Then, having assured himself that all was well, he would begin his task afresh, only for the same thing to be repeated.

And in this manner the night wore away.

Daylight came and found him exhausted.

Jonathan's drunken slumber still continued.

But when the sun fairly rose above the horizon, Mr. Noakes posted himself in such a position that he would be able to look in the direction of the inn.

There he remained fixed and immovable, dreading each moment to see something of the inhabitants of the village, for, ridiculously enough, he thought their suspicions would be directed towards the mill, and that they would come and search it.

CHAPTER DXXIX.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE OLD MISER IS DISCOVERED, AND THE MAGISTRATE AND PARTY RESOLVE TO EXPLORE THE OLD MILL.

GREAT indeed was the consternation when the landlord discovered that his house had been broken into and robbed.

He sent off at once for the village constable, and a series of alarming consultations were held.

For a time the excitement respecting the ghost at the mill was subdued.

But taking it altogether, the inhabitants of that village had never been so startled before as they had been during the past few days.

Everyone began to wonder what was coming next.

All the consultations, however, were quite fruitless—not a trace of the robbers could be found.

It was easy to see how they had entered, and, by going over the different articles, to ascertain what they had taken.

But beyond that, and the fact that they had got clear away, it was impossible to go.

The alarm was very great, because not even the oldest inhabitant could remember the occurrence of a similar event in the village.

Contrary to Mr. Noakes's fears, no suspicions were raised respecting the old mill.

Leaving them in their useless efforts to solve the mystery, we will return to Jonathan Wild.

It was late in the day when he awoke, and then feeling parched with thirst, he again applied himself to the brandy.

A great change in the weather had taken place.

The day was raw and chill, and in their exposed situation at the top of the mill, the cold was almost unendurable.

But Jonathan thought the brandy could defy it, so the whole of that day was spent in a drunken carouse, in which Mr. Noakes, forgetting his caution, at length joined.

They were soon overpowered by the quantity of liquor they drank, and while in this state of helplessness and heedlessness, danger was slowly but surely closing round about them.

Just on the outskirts of the little village there was a ruined, dilapidated house that was surrounded by a high brick wall.

In days gone by it had been the residence of the squire of the village, and had continued to be so until within the last thirty or forty years.

During that time the house had been shut up, the spacious grounds neglected, and the whole suffered to go to decay.

All the servants were dismissed, the shutters closed, and for why?

Because the last squire of the village, having no children, left the property to a younger brother.

This younger brother was of miserly, penurious habits, and after he had taken possession of his brother's property his parsimoniousness increased.

He could not think of supporting the expenses of such a large household as that was, and so by degrees the place degenerated into the condition it was at the time when Jonathan Wild took refuge in the mill.

For a long time this miser kept one domestic, a miserable, half-starved old man.

But at length this servitor died, and he could not think of replacing him by anyone else.

There was not much to do, and so he thought he might as well occupy himself as pay for others.

It was but rarely that the inhabitants of the village saw the old miser.

Still there was one place where he was in the habit of going to for the purpose of purchasing provisions.

It was but a little that he bought, and always the cheapest and commonest food that he could obtain.

It was his custom to visit this house daily.

There had been occasions, however, when one day had been missed.

He always came the next, and now the old woman who kept the shop noticed that for the first time for a long while the miser missed paying her his diurnal visit.

She made sure to see him the next morning.

But the day elapsed and he came not, nor did he arrive on the third morning.

The particulars respecting the ghost that had been seen by Enoch at the mill had reached the shopkeeper's ears, and so in a moment she connected the absence of the miser with it.

She hinted at this to several persons, and finally was taken before the magistrate, who judged the matter sufficiently important to demand immediate investigation.

Accordingly, about noon on the third day, instead of paying a visit to the mill, as he had intended, he went towards the miser's habitation, with the intent of searching that.

Several other officials who resided in the neighbourhood accompanied him, and so did the whole of the village as far as the old ruined gates.

These were fastened as well as they could be secured, considering their dilapidated state.

The magistrate rang several times for admission, but without any notice being taken of his appeal.

Then by his instructions the doors were forced open, and the party entered.

The scene which presented itself to their notice was truly one of the utmost desolation.

It was enough to make anyone's heart ache to see such a fair and beautiful place allowed to go to such decay.

The house was no better, and upon reaching the front door they again rang and knocked.

But nothing save the reverberation of the sound reached their ears.

Considering that their suspicions were now converted into certainties, the magistrate had the front door also broken down, and for the first time in his life he entered the miser's mansion.

Every part of it was thoroughly and carefully searched, but it was soon found that there was only one apartment which presented the least signs of having been recently inhabited.

All the others had evidently been closed for a length of time.

Scores of years must have elapsed since anyone crossed their thresholds.

The room which did appear to have been occupied was the kitchen.

In this, however, were only a few household articles, and among them was a bundle of damp, half-rotted straw which had served the miser for a bed.

The uninvited visitors found much to excite their curiosity and interest in the miser's abode.

But of the miser himself they could see nothing.

It was quite certain that he was not there.

No traces of violence could be discovered anywhere about the residence—everything seemed to be in its accustomed state.

In fine, the house looked just as though the miser had left it with the intention of returning in a short time.

The exploring party looked significantly into each other's countenances, and many whispered:

"Depend upon it, there has been some foul play here!"

As there was nothing more to be found out, the magistrate and his companions left the house, securing it as well as they could, and bent their steps towards the old mill.

It was rather late in the day before they had paid their visit to the miser's house, and, as this had occupied a considerable length of time, the day was drawing to a close when they walked with rapid strides across the meadows.

We may safely say that there was not one who felt entirely at his ease when close to the ill-omened structure.

Many of the villagers seemed disposed to hang back, but, borrowing some courage from their numbers, they pressed on in the rear, so as to be in readiness to turn and fly should there be any occasion.

With a firm step, the magistrate led the way up the flight of rude steps, and when he paused upon the landing, several others placed themselves by his side, but the majority kept below.

"Now," said the magistrate, "this is a serious matter, and let us consider what we had better do."

"We will leave the direction of the whole affair to you," was the unanimous response.

The magistrate bowed, and then he said:

"I fancy we cannot do better than begin at the bottom. We will completely search among the foundations of the mill, and so ascend until we reach the top."

This was immediately assented to, and so the speaker led the way into the building.

He found the interior very dark, however, and it was quite certain there was not light enough to enable them to conduct their search properly.

For the last half-hour or so, dense, heavy clouds had been spreading themselves all over the sky, so that the natural darkness was much intensified.

Just after the little party entered the mill, they were startled by a hollow, muttering, rumbling sound.

It was thunder.

Then the clouds discharged their contents, and rain poured down in a perfect deluge.

Then the lightning flashed, and the thunder increased in loudness.

"We must have lights," said the magistrate, as he walked towards the door—"we must have lights before we can conduct this investigation further. How foolish not to think of that before! Lights—lights, I say! Who will return to the village and fetch lights?"

Just then there came such a vivid flash of lightning that he was almost blinded.

It was followed by the loud crash of the thunder, which seemed to be only just above the roof of the mill.

The crowd outside the mill showed a disposition to retreat.

"Lights!" shouted the magistrate again, as he stood just within the doorway of the mill out of the rain—"lights, I say!—candles—torches—lanterns—anything! Who will fetch lights? Some of you must go at once!"

"I will go, sir!" said a voice, and a man set off at a rapid rate across the meadows.

No sooner did the others catch sight of his back than they were all impelled to show theirs also, and, crying out "Lights—lights!" they ran pell-mell across the fields in the direction of the village, leaving the magistrate and his party to await their return.

CHAPTER DCXX.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES ARE ALARMED AT THE APPROACH OF THE SEARCHING PARTY.

It was not until the return of the third day that Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes recovered from their drunken bout.

On that morning they were quite sober.

Jonathan was the first to awake.

Seeing his companion lie sleeping, he dealt him a heavy kick, which caused Mr. Noakes to open his eyes at once.

"Curse you!" said Wild. "Is that the way you keep watch while I am asleep?"

Mr. Noakes rubbed his eyes, and looked puzzled.

"I hardly recollect," he said, "what happened last. I fancy we both drank just a little too much brandy."

"Pass the keg here, then," said Jonathan. "I must have a drop before I talk."

Mr. Noakes obeyed, and then anxiously reconnoitred from the holes they had made in the woodwork.

He could see no one, and therefore he became more assured.

"All is right," he said. "I can't see anyone."

"Then let us have something to eat."

The remainder of the provisions was then brought forward.

There was but a little left, and when divided into two portions, furnished but a scanty and insufficient meal for the pair of them.

When they had despatched it, Mr. Noakes said:

"Now, Mr. Wild, what do you intend to do next?"

"Don't bother!"

"But I desire to know. Do you intend to remain here?"

"I don't know."

"Because, if you do, I want to know where we are to obtain a second supply of provisions from."

"We will see about that."

"It is time now, for you have just devoured the last morsel."

Jonathan did not answer, but took another draught of brandy.

"You have not forgot what we arranged to do, have you?"

"No; to-night, Noakes, we will get our horses, and set out. We will try our luck once more on the road. The money we obtain we can place along with that we have so fortunately gained possession of."

"I shall be glad indeed to leave this place."

"Why?"

"Because we are in perpetual danger here."

"Bah!"

"I tell you we are!"

"No doubt—no doubt! You are always croaking about something!"

"But this is no croaking. Do you think the disappearance of the old miser will pass unnoticed, or that your personation of the ghost and the robbery at the inn will not create an immense excitement?"

"So much the better for us if they do."

"Not so."

"Why not?"

"Suppose—"

"Oh, d—n your suppose!"

"Suppose," continued Noakes, calmly, "that some clear-headed chap should connect the appearance at the mill with the robbery at the inn and the disappearance of the miser, how then?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Would they not be likely to come here and search this place?"

"Of course they would."

"And yet you would stay in it?"

"No longer than to-night."

"Well, then, that is all I desire to know. It is my belief it will be a very prudent step to take."

"Well, I am going to take it," said Jonathan. "What an infernal row you have made about nothing at all!"

"Don't drink so much brandy, Mr. Wild."

"You be d—d!"

"You will get yourself into the same state as you were yesterday, and then how will you leave here to-night?"

"Leave me to myself, and don't interfere."

Finding that his remarks produced more harm than good, Mr. Noakes became silent.

At intervals, however, the conversation would be resumed in a somewhat similar strain.

"Look here, Noakes," said Wild, at last; "can we not end this matter at once?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, this: as soon as ever it is dark enough to make it prudent, we will descend, mount our horses, and ride away."

"That's just what I desire."

"Then that is what I intend to do."

"My only fear is that they may take it into their heads to search the mill before we can depart."

"Bah! That is a foolish fear, like yours always are."

"Well, we shall see—we shall see."

Jonathan Wild had decided upon a serious enterprise,

and he busied himself with preparing his weapons, and getting them in perfect readiness for use.

This task occupied him some time.

Mr. Noakes imitated his companion in this respect, but every now and then he would pause in his labour to take a peep out at the various loopholes.

While doing this, he noticed the angry storm-clouds when they appeared upon the edge of the distant horizon.

He watched them rising slowly and spreading over the sky.

Then an ejaculation of terror escaped his lips.

He dropped the pistol he held in his hand, and sank down into a dejected attitude.

"All is lost!" he said—"all is lost!—and it is your fault!"

"What do you mean, fool?"

"Look—look, and see!"

"Look be d—d!"

"I tell you you had better!"

"What is there to be seen?"

"A crowd of people!"

"A crowd of people?"

"Yes!"

Jonathan changed colour.

"And they are coming towards the mill!" added Mr. Noakes.

This was alarming news indeed; so Jonathan hastily scrambled to his feet and applied his eye to one of the openings.

One single glance, however, was sufficient to satisfy him that his companion had spoken the truth.

A large throng was certainly approaching.

He saw that the foremost were attired as gentlemen—that they were accompanied by the parish constable, who held his staff imposingly in his hand, and by a miscellaneous rout of villagers and children, who brought up the rear.

Jonathan Wild was greatly alarmed.

What to do he knew not.

Evidently, however, he must rely upon his own resources.

It would be quite useless to take his companion into consultation.

Mr. Noakes was completely prostrated by terror, and incapable of doing anything save obeying the orders of another.

To descend was Jonathan's first thought.

But then he reflected that he could not do this and better his condition.

To escape from the mill unseen was perfectly out of the question.

As the crowd approached, they could see plainly the only mode of egress from the building, and it would be madness to appear at that.

Jonathan began to wonder whether his capture was about to follow.

It seemed like it.

He was forced into a corner from which he could not emerge, and it was not likely that he could defend himself against such overwhelming numbers as were approaching.

But after having defeated the exertions of the most experienced police officers, was he in the end to be taken by a lot of clodhoppers?

He despised the idea.

"They shall pay for their attempt with their lives," he said. "They will not take me prisoner easily—I am sure of that. No, no—I will sell my life dearly!"

He got his pistols in readiness for instant use while he spoke, and sternly bade Mr. Noakes do the same.

Then he returned to the loophole, and saw that the throng of people had now paused within a few yards of the mill.

The magistrate and those who were with him ascended the steps.

They entered.

Jonathan observed the terrified expression that was upon the countenances of all who composed the crowd, and was aware of what a little thing would suffice to terrify and disperse them.

But what could that thing be?

Just while he was wondering, he heard the first muttering of the thunder.

Then the magistrate spoke in the manner we have recorded at the end of the preceding chapter.

Not a single word escaped Wild's ears.

He rubbed his hands with joy when he saw all the villagers scamper off.

He had now only about half a dozen men to cope with.

But these half-dozen men were more to be feared than all the others, and this Jonathan knew full well.

There was now no longer anything to be seen from the exterior of the mill.

The darkness in the air every moment increased.

The thunder rolled and the lightning flashed almost incessantly, each reverberation seeming to make the old mill totter to its foundations.

Stealthfully Jonathan crept forward to the open space which communicated with the lower part of the mill.

Here he paused and listened.

He made out that the party of gentlemen were standing half in and half out of the mill.

"I don't believe those fellows will return," he heard a voice say; "they are all scared out of their wits by this thunder-shower."

"It seems like it," said another voice.

"Then," continued the first speaker, "the question is, shall we continue our search now, or shall we postpone it until to-morrow?"

A pause ensued after this question was asked.

Can the reader imagine the amount of breathless suspense with which Jonathan Wild waited for the reply?

If it was decided to postpone the search, all his apprehensions would vanish.

As soon as they had departed, he could take his departure from the mill himself, and ride away, taking care not to return until the excitement had subsided.

What were they going to do?

He listened, and at last a voice spoke.

The words uttered sufficed to dash to the ground all the hopes in which he had indulged.

CHAPTER DCXXI.

JONATHAN WILD ESCAPES FROM THE MILL, AND HAS HIS REVENGE UPON THE SEARCHING PARTY.

"I SHOULD not hesitate for a single moment about the course to pursue," exclaimed the magistrate, "but for one circumstance."

"And what is that?"

"We are unprovided with a light. But for this, I would propose that we take advantage of such a favourable opportunity as the present to search the mill quietly and carefully. We shall not be disturbed by the crowding of the people inside, and we may take our own time over the business."

This was a view of the case which all seemed inclined to take, and then some one said:

"If you like to wait a minute or two, sir, I will run to the village—it is not far—and will bring with me everything you require in the shape of lights, so that the search can be well carried out."

"If you will do so, Mr. Donaldson," said the magistrate, "I shall consider myself much indebted to you."

"That is enough, sir. I am off."

"You will get wet."

"Oh, never mind; a shower of rain will not hurt me! In five minutes I will be back with some candles."

"And don't bring any of the villagers with you if you can help it."

"No, you may rely upon that."

"Let me see," said the magistrate, "there are just seven of us—quite enough to conduct an investigation of this sort."

"Quite."

Mr. Donaldson buttoned up his coat, and, hastening down the flight of steps, ran across the meadow at full speed towards the village.

He seemed to be absent a long time.

Jonathan breathed the most foul curses upon him.

He did not dare to give them utterance, lest he should be overheard.

While the messenger was absent the darkness increased.

The thunder rolled with tenfold loudness.

A complete silence, however, reigned on the part of the



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES MAKE A HASTY RETREAT.]

people who at that time stood beneath the roof of the old mill, which was not broken until the magistrate said:

"There he comes."

This was in allusion to Mr. Donaldson, who could be seen hurrying through the rain at a rapid rate.

Directly afterwards he joined the party.

"You are soaking wet," said the magistrate.

"Yes, sir, I am; this is a regular drencher—but no matter. Here are some candles, and here's a flint and steel, so we shall soon have a light."

This was true.

When one candle was lighted, it was easy to light the remainder.

Jonathan Wild, looking down from above, could just see the lights below him like so many red specks.

"Now, gentlemen," said the magistrate, "with your permission, we will carry out my original intention No. 135.—BLUESKIN.

namely, to search among the foundations of this building."

"By all means, sir—by all means! We are quite ready and willing to allow you to take the direction of the affair, and to obey you in all respects."

"Then let us search this place thoroughly—no half measures, recollect. We will not ascend until we have satisfied ourselves that there is nothing below that should not be."

"Agreed—agreed!"

Jonathan allowed his hideous countenance to expand into a grin.

He saw at once how he might escape.

He listened, and heard the trap-door raised—that is, the trap-door in the flooring of the mill, about which no secret was made, and the existence of which was well-known.

He could not see them descend, but he knew they

were about to do so, so he rose and went to his companion.

Mr. Noakes was sitting down in a stupified, dejected way.

"Get up, idiot!" said Wild, in tones of suppressed rage—"get up, will you?—dolt, fool!"

Mr. Noakes looked at him vacantly.

"Get up, I say!"

"Are they coming?"

"Coming? No. Get up, or, as sure as you refuse me, I will run you through—I will slay you on the spot! I intend to escape myself, and if you won't come with me I shall not leave you behind to peach. Do you hear that?"

A stronger fear will always overcome a weaker one, and so it was with Mr. Noakes.

The fear of present death from the hands of his ferocious companion was greater than that of capture from those below.

Therefore, trembling in every limb, he rose to his feet.

"Now then," said Wild, "the way is clear before us to escape. We can do so with perfect ease; all obstacles are removed."

Mr. Noakes looked at him incredulously, and then said:

"You are mad, or drunk."

"I am neither one nor the other. But I can't stay here chattering. While I am explaining matters to you, the chance of leaving the mill will be gone. I tell you the villagers, terrified by the storm, have run away, leaving only a small party here, who have descended into the foundations, intending to search there. They are down underneath. Do you understand? While they are there, there is nothing to prevent us leaving the mill, and the darkness will enable us to ride away unperceived."

These few rapidly-spoken words produced a wonderful change in Mr. Noakes.

He saw in an instant the chance there was of escape, and his courage revived.

"I will follow you," he said, in a calmer voice—"I will follow you—lead the way!"

"Good! Mind you do, and make no noise—the least sound will betray us."

"I will be careful enough. Now that we are so near leaving England, I don't wish to be slain or captured."

"Come, then!"

As cautiously as a snake, Jonathan Wild lowered himself through the opening in the floor; and having by this time grown tolerably familiar with the interior machinery of the mill, he was able to descend rapidly and yet noiselessly.

Mr. Noakes followed.

Gradually Jonathan made his way to the lower part of the mill, and as he got farther and farther down he redoubled his precautions.

All was profoundly dark—he could no longer see the glimmering of the candles.

He could no longer hear the murmuring of voices.

The storm, too, had reached its height, and was beginning to abate.

Directly afterwards the ground floor of the mill was reached.

Just as they were about to dart through the doorway, Wild stopped and seized his companion by the arm.

"Hush!—what's that?"

The sound of voices reached their ears, and they comprehended instantly from whence the sound came.

It was through the opening in the floor, for in descending they had not pulled the trap-door after them.

This suggested a fresh thought to Jonathan Wild.

Had his life depended upon it, he could not have restrained the wild, yelling, triumphant laugh which rose to his lips.

He did not make the attempt, however, but allowed it full vent.

It rung out with horrible distinctness and discordance in the old mill.

It awakened many an echo, and rose high above the tumult of the storm.

It was a sound that would paralyse anyone, and the party below, who were approaching the trap-door, stopped in consternation.

But while he laughed in this hideous fashion, Jonathan Wild was not idle.

Like a hungry panther he sprang forward, seized the trap-door, and shut it down.

Then, with a strength that was surely superhuman, and which was lent to him but for a moment, Jonathan Wild seized one of the millstones, dragged it violently from its place, and rolled it over the trap-door.

It fell with a crash that sounded like a death-knell to those below.

Then again, that horrible, ringing, mocking laugh echoed and re-echoed in the mill.

"Secure," said Wild—"secure! Now then, our escape is certain and easy!"

Mr. Noakes was paralysed with astonishment.

Again and again did Jonathan utter that screaming laugh.

He was delighted that at the last minute he should so unexpectedly gain such an advantage over his enemies.

"Come," said Noakes—"come, let us leave this place, now."

He took hold of Wild by the arm as he spoke.

"All right—all right," responded Jonathan; "there is no need for hurry, now they are safe; and if they don't perish of suffocation in that place before their fellows come to their aid, it will not be because I do not wish it!"

"Come," said Noakes, again—"come—be satisfied with your revenge!"

"I am—I will be."

With his heart swelling with exultation, Jonathan Wild hastily descended the steps, and sped across the meadow in search of the horses, which he hoped to find without delay.

CHAPTER DCXXII.

STEGGS ARRIVES AT THE INN JUST A LITTLE TOO LATE.

A KIND of mist floated before the eyes of Edgworth Bess when she found herself standing in the presence of the Lord Chancellor.

It did not dissipate until she heard Steggs mention her name.

"My lord," he said, "here is the lost heiress."

The Lord Chancellor looked up in surprise.

He noted the thin and wasted form, the poor apparel, the expression of woe upon his face.

"Can it be possible?"

"I am prepared to prove it, my lord!"

"Then there can be no doubt."

"None whatever!"

"I will take your word, then, for the present. Let me congratulate you," he added, rising and addressing himself to Edgworth Bess. "I heartily congratulate you, Lady Donnull, upon your accession to the property from which you have been so unjustly deprived!"

How strange it seemed to be addressed by that title.

She could not respond.

She bent her head in acquiescence.

"That will do, then, for to-night. Until further arrangements can be made, you will stay here. To-morrow, I shall inquire further into the affair."

For this kind offer of protection Edgworth Bess managed to stammer forth her thanks.

The Chancellor rang a bell, and confided Edgworth Bess to the care of the housekeeper.

"I could scarcely have believed this," said the Chancellor, as soon as the door closed behind her. "No one would take her to be an heiress."

"Very true, my lord. She has suffered much."

"She has that appearance."

"I know something of what she has gone through, but probably not one-half."

"Well, it is all over now. She may rest contented with regard to the future. To-morrow I shall want to see you, in order that the matter may be properly investigated."

"I will not fail to come, my lord."

With these words, Steggs took his departure.

On the following day, Edgworth Bess was again introduced into the presence of the Lord Chancellor.

He had before him all the necessary documents, including even the confession of Abel Donnull.

"You must understand," he said, "that there will be no opposition to your taking possession of your property. Providing you can make good your claim to it, there is no

one to contend with. When your identity is once proved it will be sufficient."

He then questioned Edgworth Bess respecting her past life.

She answered him readily and truthfully, and these replies accorded perfectly with all the written memoranda he had before him.

In conclusion, he professed himself perfectly satisfied.

There was a wild, tumultuous joy in the poor girl's heart at having, she imagined, reached the end of her difficulties and troubles.

She would no longer have to fear the enmity of anyone.

But she was deeply anxious respecting her two protectors.

They had defended her when no one else would take her part, and she was conscious that but for them she must long ago have perished.

At the first opportunity, she took Steggs aside and spoke to him upon the subject that was nearest her heart.

"Tell me," she said—"tell me truly, have you heard anything of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Alas—alas!"

"But, if you wish it, I will set forth at once and make inquiries for them."

"Do so—do so!"

"Can you give me any clue to them?"

"I fear not. But say, when will my power begin?"

"Your power?"

"Yes. When can I openly befriend them?"

"At present you must not think of such a thing—the greatest caution will be necessary!"

"But for what reason?"

"Wait until you are quite assured of your possession, and until I have discovered them. I will then be a means of communication between you."

"And what can I do then?"

"Ask the Chancellor to move for a free pardon."

"And could he obtain one?"

"It is very likely."

"Then there is a doubt about it?"

"No, not much of a doubt; but, for the present, let me advise you to dismiss this subject from your mind altogether."

"I cannot."

"Try to do so."

"It is impossible!"

"It would be better if you could for a little while rest content with the knowledge that you have recovered your possessions and now occupy your true station."

"I care nothing for that without I can aid those who have so long been my friends."

"At any rate, it will be best—nay, imperatively necessary, that I should find Blueskin and Jack, and learn from them what their intentions are."

"But can you find them?"

"I do not doubt it."

"Where shall you look?"

"I fear there is little but chance to guide me, yet I may succeed quickly. Don't be disappointed, however, if some time elapses."

Edgworth Bess clasped her hands over her forehead.

"Let me think," she said—"let me think! My brain is in such a whirl, and I am so excited by these events that I seem incapable of reflection! Wait a moment!"

Steggs did wait.

Then, presently removing her hands, she said:

"There is another commission I wish you to execute for me."

"Name it."

"Not long before my meeting with you I met a true, firm friend—the landlady of a public-house."

"And you wish me to go there?"

"Yes. Tell her that I am now safe and well."

"I will if you will describe the house."

Edgworth Bess did so as well as she was able.

"Do you think," asked Steggs, "that there is any probability of learning intelligence of Jack and Blueskin there?"

"None whatever, I fear."

"That's a pity; I thought this might be a connecting link."

"No—no; and yet I cannot tell."

"You think there is a possibility, then?"

"They may, in their pursuit, have tracked me to this inn; if so—"

"Why, then all will be well. This is most important! If you will allow me, I will start at once."

"Do—do, and you will increase the obligation I am already under to you. I am glad there is so good a chance of my being able to repay it."

"I will go to this inn, then, and make every inquiry. If I can learn anything of your friends I will mention the subject to the landlady, so that when they do call she will deliver a message to them."

"Yes—yes! I trust you will succeed."

"Leave it to me. Rely upon it, I will do the best I can."

"When shall I see you again?"

"If I have good news to communicate, very shortly. If some time elapses do not despair, but think that I am making every effort to pursue my inquiries."

"I will—I will!"

"Try, then, to rest content until you see me again; for the present, you will remain in this house. Several forms have to be gone through, and after that you will be placed in full and real possession of your own."

"And by that time," said Edgworth Bess, with sparkling eyes, "I hope you will be returned with good news."

"And so do I."

"It is pleasing to me to talk upon this subject, yet I wish you gone."

"I will start at once, and you may rely upon my energy and fidelity. Farewell!"

With these words Steggs took his leave, and directed his steps towards the inn.

Upon arriving, he found the landlady in her accustomed seat.

"I wish to speak with you," he said, "upon a matter of some importance."

"Come in!"

Steggs obeyed the invitation to enter the bar.

"A day or two ago," he began, "you afforded help and assistance to a young girl."

"Yes—yes, I did. What of her? She has come to no harm, I trust?"

"No, none; but to great good."

"I am glad to hear it."

"I have come here as a special messenger from her to you."

"On what account?"

"First to express her thanks for your kindness to her."

"It is not worth mentioning."

"She is of a different opinion, and one of these days intends to reward you liberally for all you have done."

"It was but a little."

"It was very much to her."

"And are you one of the friends of whom she spoke to me?"

"Very likely. I fortunately met her in the street and recognised her. I had long been looking for her, trusting to find her. Now all is well. You must know that her father was a lord, and that she is now the inheritor of all his wealth and property."

This announcement caused the landlady no little astonishment.

"Who would have thought it now?" she said—"quiet and unassuming as she was too!"

"But after having assured you of her safety," continued Steggs, "my chief object is to make some inquiries for two friends of hers."

"Two friends?"

"Yes, she thinks it not improbable that they may track her to this house, and if so, would enter to make inquiries. Should they do so, tell them all that I have said to you, and ask them to wait; I will call and satisfy them."

"Two friends, did you say?"

"Yes."

"One young and the other rather old?"

"Yes—yes! Is it possible that you have seen them—that you know them?"

"Well, I can't say for that," replied the landlady, "but a few hours ago two men came in and asked for her."

"And where are they now?"

"That is more than I can tell you."

"They have gone, then?"

"Yes; I told them the girl had left this house. The news seemed to fill them with grief and despair, then they both started off in search of her."

"Confusion!" said Steggs. "This will perhaps ruin all!"

The landlady looked at him in surprise.

"Did they not," he asked, at length, "say anything about their future movements?"

"No, I can't say that they did, though they told me they should very likely call again—if that's what you mean."

CHAPTER DCCXIII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD HAVE AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW WITH STEGGS.

"THEY told you they would call again?"

"Yes, certainly."

"But when?"

"They did not say when, sir."

"Describe them to me."

The landlady did so to the best of her ability.

What she said was quite sufficient to convince Steggs of their identity.

"And when was this?"

"Only a few hours ago."

"Then they are probably in the neighbourhood?"

"I can't say for that."

"Look you—pay attention to my instructions; you will find that it will answer your purpose well to do so."

"I will."

"I will go out myself; it is possible that I may come across them; if so, well and good. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly."

"But if, while I am away, they come again, tell them of my visit, and say it is my express desire that they wait here until I return. You will find them with an accommodation, will you not?"

"I will, sir."

"That will do, then. Upon no account suffer them to depart until I return, it will be useless for them to attempt to seek me."

Having fully impressed this upon the landlady's mind, Steggs took his departure.

He roamed listlessly through the streets for a long while, looking scrutinisingly in every direction.

But he failed to see anything of those he sought.

It is now time, however, that we reverted to the proceedings of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

We have lost sight of them for some time.

We last described them when they departed from the inn to commence their search for Edgworth Bess.

The events already related, of course, conclusively prove that this search was perfectly resultless.

They searched through every street they came to.

But without the slightest success.

Yet they did not like to confess themselves vanquished.

As they did not find Edgworth Bess, there can be little interest in relating their proceedings; let it suffice to say that it was not until they were thoroughly worn out and exhausted that they gave up the search.

A consultation was then held as to where they should go.

"I fancy we cannot do better than return to the inn," said Blueskin.

"It will be dangerous."

"Not very, I think."

"The landlady may have recognised you."

"I fancy not. Let us run the risk."

"As you will."

"Do not forget that it is probable Edgworth Bess—having failed to find us, as she must have done—has returned to the inn; if so, we shall meet her."

"That I fear is too much to hope for. No—no, I cannot buoy myself up with that hope."

"But now that I have once suggested the possibility of such a thing to you, you could not rest until you had satisfied yourself as to the truth of it."

"No, that I could not."

"Then follow me; a little sharp walking will bring us

to the place. If we meet with no success, do not be downhearted."

"I will try not."

"At any rate, it is my conviction we should find there a more secure shelter than we could anywhere else in London."

This conversation took place on the night succeeding the day upon which Steggs had called at the inn.

Without being seen or noticed by anyone, the two friends arrived at their destination.

As soon as the landlady saw them, she smiled with satisfaction, and led them into the private room.

"You have come just in time," she said—"just in time, or, I should say, just too late."

"What do you mean?—has she been here?"

"No—no."

"Then why are we too late?"

"A friend of yours called not long ago."

"A friend?"

"Yes."

"How do you know he was a friend?"

"He said so."

"Well, go on—tell us more," said Blueskin.

Jack Sheppard was so excited that he could not speak. He dreaded that the poor girl had again fallen into some snare.

He could not remember that she had any other friend besides themselves.

"He was very much put about when I told him that you had been here and gone again. He wanted to see you."

"To see us?"

"Yes; I fancy he has some message for you from the young lady."

"Where is he?"

"He went out to search for you."

"To search for us?"

"Yes, and he has not yet returned."

Blueskin and Jack looked at each other with a puzzled kind of expression on their countenances.

"Describe this friend," they said.

The landlady did so.

But Steggs had so altered in his appearance, that they failed to recognise him.

They could not think who he was.

Their wonder increased.

"He particularly told me," added the landlady, "that if you called here before he returned, you were on no account to quit this house until he came again."

"Did he say that?"

"Yes, he did, and laid most particular stress upon it. He repeated the instructions over and over again."

"Well, we must think of this," said Blueskin. "Bring us some refreshment, and leave us for awhile—we must consult together."

The landlady obeyed, for her curiosity was much inflamed by the mysterious events of the last two or three days.

"What are we to think of this, Jack?" was Blueskin's first question as soon as they had the room to themselves.

"I know not what to think of it."

"Nor I."

"Do you apprehend any danger?"

"I do indeed!"

"And so do I. You have guessed my own thoughts in the matter. It is no friend of hers, poor girl! but some one who is endeavouring to pass himself off as such. Yet why should he wish to meet us?"

"That is it. I am afraid—nay, sure—that he has recognised us."

"So you fear the worst?"

"I do."

"What would be the consequences if he called the police officers about him, and surrounded the house?"

"Most serious indeed to us."

"Serious in good truth. Let us see what chance there is of escape."

They went to the window, and looked out.

They found it commanded a view of the river, which was divided from the back of the premises by a rude wooden fence.

"I think we should stand a chance of getting free," said Blueskin.

"So do I."
 "Then let us stay and see this matter out."
 "Is it wise to run the risk?"
 "I think so. It may, after all, be some one who has friendly intentions towards her and towards us; if so, it would be a pity to evade him."
 "So it would, but I am doubtful—very doubtful."
 "And well you may be."
 At this moment there came a knock at the door.
 The landlady entered.
 "He has come," she said, "and wants to see you."
 Blueskin and Jack exchanged glances.
 "Let him come in," said the former. "Tell him we are here."
 The landlady departed.
 As soon as she had gone, Blueskin said, in a whisper:
 "Now, then, if we find he meditates any treachery towards us, we will deal with him in a summary manner, and escape."
 "Right. Be careful!"
 "I will. Hush!"
 The door opened, and Steggs appeared.
 But he was not recognised by either.
 "I am glad I have succeeded in meeting with you," he ejaculated. "Believe me, all is well, and I have good news to communicate."
 The two friends regarded him distrustfully.
 "Is it possible," he said, "that you do not recognise me?"
 "Certainly not."
 "I know I have greatly altered, but I thought you might have remembered my voice."
 "It does sound familiar in my ears."
 "Perhaps the utterance of my name may refresh your recollection."
 "It may—speak!"
 "It is Steggs."
 "I recognise you now," said Blueskin. "I know you are a friend—your behaviour has proved it. Here is my hand."
 "I am glad you do not doubt me. Here, Jack," he added, "take my hand! I bear you no ill-will, although I suffered much from the hasty blow you gave me."
 Jack grasped him cordially by the hand.
 "It was a rash and foolish act," he said, "and one that I have repented of ever since."
 "Say nothing more about it—don't mention it again!"
 "And you have found Edgworth Bess?" said Blueskin, interrogatively.
 "I have."
 "And where is she?"
 "Safe and well."
 "But where?"
 "In the residence of the Lord Chancellor."
 This reply was so little anticipated by our two friends that they could not speak.
 "You seem astonished," said Steggs, "and well you may be; but it's perfectly true."
 "How came it about?"
 "Last night I accidentally met her in the street. The light of a lamp shining on her face enabled me to recognise her."
 "And did she know you?"
 "Not at first. She told me she left the inn in order to seek for you, but unluckily encountered Jonathan Wild's son, and had a narrow escape from him. She had eluded him by a hairbreadth when I met her."
 "And what did you do then?"
 "Why, as I had been on the look-out for her for a very long time, I took her direct to the residence of the Lord Chancellor."
 "And does he receive her?"
 "Oh, yes!"
 "And admit her claims?"
 "Yes. In his own mind he does not entertain the slightest doubt of her identity."
 "This is indeed glorious news," said Blueskin—"glorious news! What I have so long and so ardently desired has at length come to pass! She is in proper hands and is happy!"
 "Not very happy," said Steggs.
 "Why not? What cause has she now for grief?"
 "The uncertainty she is in with regard to your safety;

if she knew that you were out of danger she would be quite happy."

CHAPTER DCXXIV.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD HOLD AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW WITH STEGGS.

"THE one great purpose of our lives," said Blueskin, "is achieved."
 "What do you mean?"
 "The lost heiress is installed in her possessions. We had sworn to do it. let the danger be what it might. It is done, and now we are content!"
 "Well?"
 "As you say, it is well, for we can quickly put an end to the anxiety and unhappiness which Edgworth Bess may experience on our behalf."
 "Do so, then—do so, I beg! But how will it be accomplished?"
 "Why, as our presence here is unsuspected and unknown, nothing will be so easy as for us to leave England; in another land we shall be safe."
 "A wise resolution, and the best that you could take! When shall you depart?"
 "Shortly, I hope."
 "Why not at once? Now that you know that Edgworth Bess is in safety, why not fly immediately?"
 "For a particular reason."
 "What is it?"
 "I have told you that one purpose of our lives was achieved."
 "Then you have another?"
 "We have."
 "And have you sworn to that as well?"
 "Yes, and until it is accomplished we cannot leave English shores."
 "Will you tell me what it is?"
 "Certainly; and I trust you will make it known to Edgworth Bess."
 "I will, never fear."
 "I call her by that familiar title because the other seems strange."
 "No doubt; but go on. What is this purpose?"
 "It is to do that which the police officers have entirely failed to bring about."
 "Indeed!"
 "Yes—to capture Jonathan Wild!"
 Steggs started.
 "Now that this anxiety is off our minds," continued Blueskin—"I mean the anxiety we felt concerning the fortunes of Edgworth Bess—we shall turn the whole of our attention and devote all our energies to the task of hunting the villain down! We will not rest in any way until he is either dead or in the hands of justice!"
 "You have sworn to that?"
 "Yes."
 "Both of you?"
 "Yes."
 "Then give me your hands, for I have sworn the same oath!"
 "You?"
 "Yes!"
 "But for what reason?"
 "From the enmity I feel for that fiend in human shape."
 "Then he has injured you?"
 "Deeply, and in a manner in which I shall neither forget nor forgive! It is strange how we have been actuated by the same impulses. I had resolved to find Edgworth Bess first, and place her in the charge of the Lord Chancellor, which I knew was all that was necessary, and then, as soon as it was over, it was my determination to set out upon the villain's track!"
 "It is strange, as you say. I believe your words respecting Edgworth Bess; I have no doubt of the truth of what you have just stated."
 "That's right. It is true—believe me, it is quite true!"
 "I do believe you."
 "Our immediate purpose," said Jack Sheppard, "is to commence a pursuit of Jonathan Wild. We have already a clue to guide us. We have tracked him to a certain point, and beyond that we can doubtless follow him."
 "That is very important."

"And now," continued Jack, "it seems to me, that what we have to do is to consult together as to the steps that shall be taken."

"Just so."

"We are all working to one end, and therefore we ought to decide upon a common plan of operations."

"What do you propose?" asked Steggs.

"Well," said Blueskin, "as your object is the same as ours, will you join us? Shall we all three set out together to accomplish our aim?"

"I think not."

"Just as you please."

"You see," said Steggs, "that I am placed in rather a peculiar situation, and have some other things to attend to immediately. I shall set about my work in a fashion of my own; that I shall succeed I do not doubt. No—no, you two agree together very well. Work out your scheme yourselves, and leave me to myself."

"We are quite agreeable."

"Then let us look upon that point as settled. I will return to Edgworth Bess, tell her that I have seen you, and what you intend to do, and after that I will begin my search."

"And we will begin at once."

"Don't think," added Steggs, "that I wish to pry into your business; don't think either that I would be guilty of any treachery towards you. Place confidence in me."

"We will—we do!"

"Well, then, how do you intend to commence operations?"

"Luckily," said Blueskin, "we are possessed of two good horses."

"Steggs nodded."

"They are in a stable hard by. We shall mount them as soon as it is dark, and ride out of London."

"And make you way, I suppose, to the place to which you have already tracked Jonathan Wild?"

"Exactly—to a roadside public-house where he signalled his visit by some of his old barbarities."

"Yes, that's it," said Steggs. "You will get upon his track easily enough, for wherever he goes he will leave a trail of blood or violence behind—you will be sure to track him!"

"That was just my thought!"

"It would be, knowing the man so well as you do."

"Success will attend, I feel certain!" said Jack Sheppard—"I can feel a presentiment to that effect!"

"But shall you go as you now are?" asked Steggs.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, attired as you are at present, or should you disguise yourselves?"

"That's an excellent suggestion!" said Blueskin. "I did not, in my excitement, give that a thought. It would be much better and safer to adopt some disguise."

"Unquestionably so."

"I think we are much indebted to you for the thought; it might not have occurred to us until too late."

"Don't mention it!"

"The point to be decided," said Jack, "is what disguise shall we adopt?"

"We must reflect," said Blueskin.

"Steggs," said Jack, "can you offer us another suggestion?"

"I don't know that I can. You are at liberty to choose almost any attire. One end, however, you must particularly keep in view."

"What is that?"

"In disguising yourselves, you must make yourselves look as different as you can."

"We should be sure to do that."

"But I mean, you should look out for and select two characters quite opposite to your own, and play them to the best of your ability."

"I catch your notion."

"I can tell you do."

"For instance," said Blueskin: "if I were to disguise myself as some country farmer or landholder."

"Exactly!" cried Steggs. "You could not possibly do better—you would look the character, I am sure, if you were careful!"

"I think I could sustain it."

"Well, then," said Steggs, "if you decided on that it seems to me there is only one thing that Jack can be."

"What is that?"

"You will travel together?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, two people can scarcely do that without suspicion, except some precaution is taken."

"I don't quite comprehend you."

"Why, if Jack disguises himself as your groom, or footman, or servant, or attendant, and rides with you, you will excite no remark."

"Excellent—excellent!" cried Jack. "I don't much fear the police officers; but even Jonathan Wild would, I fancy, fail to recognise me in such a garb as that."

"Then may we say that this is decided upon?"

"You may."

"I feel now more hopeful and confident than ever," exclaimed Blueskin, "and one thing alone remains to be done!"

"What is it?"

"Simple as it seems, it may present some difficulties."

"But what is it?"

"The obtaining of the disguises."

"Yes, it is highly important that few people should be aware of this change in your appearance."

"Exactly so."

"Then," said Jack, "when and how are these disguises to be obtained?"

"If you will leave it to me——" began Steggs.

"We will do so readily—gladly!"

"Then I will leave here and purchase them for you."

"If you will, we shall be under a deep obligation to you."

"Don't name it; the service itself is trifling enough."

"Not so—not so."

"But I say it is. I will take care that the disguises are obtained in a manner that will excite no suspicion."

"Then our task will be easy indeed."

"I will purchase them myself," continued Steggs, "and bring them here."

"By what time?"

"That I can hardly state, but certainly between now and nightfall."

"That will do, then—it will suit us admirably."

"Then we can quit this part of our discussion?"

"We can. When shall you repair to Edgworth Bess?"

"As soon as I have obtained the disguises."

"Well, then, oblige me by setting out at once, and pray return as speedily as possible."

"I will; but of course I shall be careful in all my movements."

"Certainly—certainly."

"Farewell, then, for a short time; I shall soon return."

With these words Steggs took his departure.

After the door closed behind him there followed one of those peculiar pauses which sometimes take place.

Neither Blueskin nor Jack could find a word to say.

At length the latter, starting from a kind of reverie, said:

"Blueskin, what do you think of Steggs?"

"Think of him?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"As to his fidelity and sincerity."

"I have every confidence in him."

"I have my doubts."

"Doubts? and for what?"

"I can't precisely tell you, but I do doubt his good faith."

"You are wrong, Jack—quite wrong. You doubted him before, if you recollect, when there was not the shadow of a cause for your doing so. You wounded him severely, and brought about a long train of sufferings; for this, you see, he has forgiven you!"

"He has professed to do so."

"I believe he was in earnest."

"Then I don't; he is not the man to forgive an injury so easily; he would rather seek for some terrible revenge."

"I think you are mistaken, Jack—indeed I do!"

"Well, I may be."

"I hope you are."

"And so do I, and yet——"

"What?"

"I wish we had not taken him so deeply into our confidence. You see now he knows all our plans—we have

told him just what we intend to do, and he may have quitted the house now only as a pretext."

"A pretext?"

"Yes—he may return with the police officers."

"If he does betray us, he will do so completely—he will leave no loophole for escape; we shall be captured."

"Your fears, Jack, are unfounded."

"Well, we shall see—we shall see. If no disturbance takes place, and if presently he returns with the disguises there will be an end to your suspicions."

"There will—there will."

"Then we can only wait for the result with patience: for myself I feel content."

Although Blueskin said this, it was scarcely the truth. In spite of himself, the doubts and suspicions which Jack had spoken of impressed themselves in his mind.

As the time wore on, he grew more and more anxious for Steggs to make his appearance, and paced up and down the little room in ill-disguised impatience.

Jack noted this, but said nothing.

In this uncomfortable manner the time elapsed until night came.

When it grew dark, Jack hinted that the time had arrived for Steggs to make his attack upon them with the utmost advantage.

Growing more and more uneasy each moment, Blueskin went to the window and looked out.

He fancied he could see an easy way of making his escape, should they be attacked.

Just then there came a knock at the door, and the landlady entered.

"That friend of yours has returned," she said.

"Ask him to come in."

"Now, Jack," whispered Blueskin, "we shall quickly know the worst."

"We shall; if he is false, we cannot long remain in ignorance of it."

"No, but hush! he comes!"

CHAPTER DOXXV.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD COMMENCE THEIR PURSUIT OF JONATHAN WILD.

JUST then the door opened again and Steggs entered.

In his arms he carried a large parcel.

"Here are the things," he said, calmly. "I have had a good deal of difficulty in procuring them ready made of the right size; moreover, I was careful to buy them in a quarter of London remote from this, so that there should be less chance of a discovery."

Blueskin looked at Jack while these words were spoken, and his glance conveyed the words to Jack:

"You see how groundless your suspicions were."

The parcel was opened, and the contents examined.

"You had better disguise yourselves without delay," said Steggs. "It is quite dark now, and you may ride away unseen."

"Would you keep the change a secret from the landlady here?"

"I would if possible."

"Then I'll tell you how it may be done."

"How?"

"We will go out just as we are, leaving you here; we will settle up the score with the landlady, and tell her that you are in this room and wish to remain in it undisturbed. Then we will to all appearance bid her farewell and leave the house; but instead of doing so, we will make our way round to the back and enter through the window. We will then disguise ourselves, and leave by the same means."

"Excellent!" said Steggs. "You cannot take too many precautions, and this is one that will, I am sure, be much to your advantage. I will assist you in it to the utmost. Do not lose any more time, but go at once."

"We will."

Blueskin and Jack then left the room.

Steggs closed the door and locked it, so as to be secure from interruption.

According to their intention, Blueskin and Jack went to the bar, and, after paying the reckoning, thanked the landlady over and over again for the kindness she had shown, not only to them but to Edgworth Bess.

"Our friend," they said, "wishes to remain here some

time longer; we have left him in the room we have just quitted; do not disturb him, for he is engaged upon important business."

"Very good, gentlemen."

After a few more similar remarks, the two friends quitted the inn.

"Stop," said Jack, suddenly, "there's another thing we must bear in mind."

"What's that?"

"The horses."

"Oh! ah! the horses!"

"What scheme can we adopt to obtain possession of them without the keeper of the stables knowing anything about our disguises?"

This was a very difficult problem, but it was highly necessary that it should be solved.

Both set their wits to work, and in a little while Jack devised a means.

"Look you," he said: "we are now attired as we were when we left the horses; we will call now."

"Well, go on."

"We will say that in a short time we will send some one for the horses, as it will not be convenient to come ourselves. We could pay the money and describe Steggs, saying that a man of such an appearance will call."

"Excellent!" said Blueskin; "that gets over the difficulty at once. It's wonderful how simple these things are if you will only look them in the face."

Accordingly, they paid a visit to the stables, and had no difficulty whatever in making the necessary arrangements.

Then, without loss of time, they crept down to the water's edge and made their way cautiously round to the back of the inn, and over the wooden fence.

The window was then straight before them.

They reached it without hindrance or interruption, and without being observed by anybody.

Steggs was there waiting for and expecting them.

He assisted them through the window, and then, as all the clothing was in readiness, they proceeded to disguise themselves.

This occupied a considerable length of time, but it was time well spent.

By the time they had finished, such a complete metamorphosis had taken place that Jack and Blueskin could scarcely recognise each other.

"We shall do now capitally, I think," said the former.

"Yes," replied Steggs; "I never saw a more excellent or complete disguise. Rely upon it, it will deceive even Jonathan Wild himself."

"I believe it will; and now, mentioning his name makes me desirous of stealing off and commencing the pursuit at once."

"I should recommend you to do so, for fear the landlady should be inquisitive enough to come to the door."

"Well, then, Steggs, I will tell you what we want you to do. We will pass out of the window as arranged, climb over the fence, and crouch down behind it. You know just where the fence is, do you not? It is too dark to see it now."

"Oh yes, I know where it is well enough."

"Then as soon as we have taken our departure by the window, you leave by the door. On the first turning to the left you will see some livery stables. Go there and say you have called for two horses; they will know all about them, and will expect you."

"That's another excellent precaution," Steggs ejaculated.

"It is; we thought of it after we got into the street. We will wait for you near the fence. When you have obtained the horses, lead them down to the water's edge, where you will find us."

"All right. And now what do you think of doing with the clothes you have taken off?"

"My intention was to have them tied up in a bundle with a large stone in the middle, and cast them into the Thames."

"A very good mode of disposing of them, and I should recommend it, but I would not include your long riding cloaks; keep them—they may be useful and serviceable, for the weather is very unsettled."

"Very."

"You can easily carry them strapped to the pommel of your saddles; then, should circumstances require it, you

could put them on and effect a considerable change in your appearance."

"So we could."

This was agreed to, and the cloaks were retained.

Jack and Blueskin, according to the arrangement, passed out of the window, which Steggs closed after them, and secured so that there should be no suspicion.

Then he left the inn by the front door, went to the stables, and led the horses round to the appointed spot.

In the meanwhile, the two friends, carrying the bundle of apparel, once more climbed over the fence, and, having found a large stone, placed it in the bundle.

There were some large barges moored at the water's edge, so Jack, seizing the bundle, nimbly sprang on to one of them, and ran from one end to the other.

He paused on the bow of the vessel.

Then, with all his might, he flung the bundle from him.

There was a splash, and then it disappeared.

The stone immediately dragged the clothing down to the muddy bed of the river.

Then, hastily returning, he rejoined his companion, and waited for Steggs to arrive.

Their patience was not put to a very severe trial, for soon the sound of horses' hoofs came upon their ears.

In another moment Steggs arrived.

"Here they are," he said. "Now, mount and ride away, and I trust success will soon reward your efforts."

"It will—it will! Rely upon it, it will!"

"Then now, having wished you good speed, I will say farewell to both."

"Farewell! Yet, ere we part, let me entreat you to give Edgworth Bess a full and particular account of all that has passed between us. Tell her how well we are disguised, and what a good chance we have of effecting our purpose."

"I will—I will let her know all."

"Say that we are scarcely in any danger, and that, as soon as Jonathan Wild is slain or a prisoner, we will leave England, and do the best we can for ourselves in a foreign land."

"I will tell her so, and bring you word what she says in reply."

"Once more, then, farewell!"

So saying, Blueskin and Jack touched their horses lightly with the spur, and set off at a rapid pace.

According to the determination they had expressed, they directed their course towards the inn where, the reader will remember, they obtained very particular information concerning Jonathan Wild.

From that point they would be able to extend their inquiries.

There was much truth in the remark made by Steggs to the effect that wherever he went Jonathan would leave a trail of blood behind him by which he could be followed.

In recalling to memory all the varied incidents that befel him after leaving the inn just mentioned, the reader will at once be struck with the number of acts of violence committed, by some of which surely his progress could be noted.

Blueskin and Jack scarcely exchanged a syllable with each other until they emerged into the Oxford Road.

Then they drew in deep aspirations of the cool, country air, and felt wonderfully refreshed.

"I am a new man now," said Jack, "and equal to any emergency. My heart is as light, and I feel jovial and happy as of old."

"And I too. Now that the great source of anxiety and distress is removed—now that I know Edgworth Bess is secure and in safety, I feel such an elation of spirits that I can scarcely contain myself. But you must not forget, Jack, the purpose with which we set out."

"Never fear that I shall forget that!" was the reply, given in an altered tone of voice. "I have suffered more at his hands than anyone else; so it is not likely I shall forget him!"

Jack ground his teeth savagely together while he spoke.

"Let us endeavour as well as we can to prevent our attention being diverted from the object we have in view."

"That, I fancy, is an unnecessary caution."

"Well, we shall see."

"We shall."

"Jonathan has succeeded for a long time in eluding all the officers of justice, but we have done the same thing ourselves."

"We have."

"But with us in pursuit of him, it will be quite another matter. We have a personal interest in the pursuit—a deeper, stronger interest than the mere hope of obtaining a share in a reward could possibly excite."

"Yes; that feeling is revenge, and Jonathan will not escape it. We shall hunt him down, so surely as ever anyone was hunted down; and at the last moment, I will exult over him; I have always said that I should live to see the day when he swung from Tyburn Tree, and so I shall—so I shall, for the day is not far distant!"

"Hark!" said Blueskin—"hark—did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"Stop—listen!"

He pulled up his horse abruptly as he spoke, and so did Jack.

"What is it?" asked the latter again.

"Hush—hush—listen! Perhaps I was mistaken. Perhaps we shall hear it again!"

CHAPTER DOXXVI.

REVERTS TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES.

JONATHAN WILD might well exult when he accomplished the feat of rolling the heavy millstone over the trap-door.

By that means he not only put an effectual stop to the interference of his enemies, but at the same time placed them in anything but an agreeable situation.

They were searching among the rubbish very near to the trap-door when Wild closed it, and the noise above filled them with the liveliest alarm.

The timbers cracked and creaked, while the dust fell down in a shower.

For one moment they feared the flooring of the mill, which was old and decayed, would give way beneath the heavy weight.

But the wood-work stood the shock bravely.

There they were, however, caged up—fast prisoners in every sense of the word.

The magistrate looked from one to another of his companions in surprise.

They were greatly alarmed; and Mr. Donaldson, in rather an anxious voice, inquired:

"What can be the meaning of this?"

"I fancy I can see it all," said the magistrate. "I may be wrong, but I have my suspicions."

"What are they?"

"Why, some atrocious villains have made this empty, disused mill their temporary hiding-place. Had we searched the upper portion first, I believe we should have found them—as we did not, they have stolen a march upon us."

All shuddered when they heard Jonathan's exulting laughter.

The opinion enunciated by the magistrate was of a character that carried conviction with it, and all his hearers at once concluded that he had arrived at the true state of affairs.

That, however, was scarcely the moment for them to deliberate much upon such a point.

They were made prisoners—that was a most obvious fact, and the next thing to do was to make their escape.

Whether the inhabitants would return was doubtful.

And if they did, it would be difficult to make them understand how the party was situated.

The magistrate took this view of the case:

"We must rely entirely upon our own exertions," he said. "It's no good depending upon the villagers."

To this all assented.

"Therefore, gentlemen, we will look round and examine this place thoroughly; we shall then discover which is the weakest point, and then make a resolute attempt to escape."

This was a very judicious proposition.

The foundations of the mill were not of any great extent, and so the examination was quickly made.

"I fancy this will be the place," said the magistrate.

"There's a good deal of rubbish to remove; but we must



[THE ROBBERY BY THE FOOTPAD IN THE LANE.]

set to it with a will. Then a little strength will enable us to make an opening through the old timbers."

Convenient places were selected for placing the candles so as to light them in their work.

Then the whole party commenced operations most vigorously.

It was a long and fatiguing labour to remove the quantity of miscellaneous rubbish with which the place was literally choked up.

At length they succeeded, and nothing intervened between them and freedom except the wooden framework of the mill.

They were very ill provided with tools for making an opening through the boards.

A long iron bar, or something of that kind, was needed, but they had nothing that would serve as a substitute.

Among the rubbish, however, they found several good-sized stones.

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These they picked up and flung with all their might against the boarding.

Sometimes the blow would be followed by a cracking sound.

Whenever they saw the wood split in this manner, they redoubled their efforts.

At length, after much labour, very much to their surprise, a large piece of the woodwork flew out bodily, leaving an opening large enough for them to emerge at once.

It was well that everyone obeyed the impulse to start forward.

They were anxious to escape from the close, damp atmosphere.

To that anxiety they unquestionably owed their lives.

The ruined mill was in a very frail and tottering condition, and the removal of that portion of the woodwork

near the foundations served to derange the whole structure.

A heavy gust of wind, too, rose with great suddenness, and blew with full force against it.

It bent slowly before the blast.

There was a creaking and groaning of timbers swaying to and fro.

A cry of horror from the party who had just escaped, and then the mill fell with a terrific crash to the ground.

Fortunately the magistrate and his companions were made aware of their danger in time to get out of the reach of the falling materials.

It was but the work of a moment.

At the end of that time there was nothing left of the ruined mill but a confused mass of fragments of timber, iron, and stone.

The space it occupied was inconceivably small, and no one would have believed that so many objects could have been crushed into so small a compass.

Several seconds elapsed before the magistrate and his friends could recover sufficiently from the shock to congratulate themselves upon the narrow escape they had had.

"There's an end of the old ruined mill!" said the magistrate—"we shall be troubled no more with stories of apparitions and the like;—it's all over now, and I suppose the mystery will never be fully explained. I question whether we shall ever know much more about it than we do now; but time will show."

The storm had not yet abated, nor had the rain ceased.

The latter poured down in one ceaseless torrent.

In less than two minutes, the magistrate and his party were wet through to the skin.

"I suppose we can do no more good," said one.

The magistrate hesitated.

"It's very wet," he replied; "and as the mill has fallen into a mass of ruin, I fancy we shall be of little service if we remain."

"That's just what I think," returned Mr. Donaldson.

"Then, gentlemen," added the magistrate, "if you are of the same opinion—as doubtless you are—you will follow me."

"We will—we will!"

"In the morning, however, I will have strict measures taken, and this mystery shall be probed to the very bottom. It shall not be my fault if it remain unsolved."

With these words, the magistrate, having buttoned up his coat and placed his hat firmly on his head, ran hastily across the fields in the direction of his dwelling.

He was followed by the rest of his party, who were thoroughly tired of the night's adventures.

There was not one of them who could think of the fall of the mill without a shudder of horror.

Had they been a moment later, they must have been buried beneath the fragments.

The lightning still flashed and the thunder roared.

Then presently there came one flash more vivid and more enduring than any that had preceded it.

For an infinitesimal portion of time the whole landscape for miles and miles around was illuminated with the blue, sulphurous glare.

With startling relief every object was brought out—trees, meadows, fences—everything.

Instinctively the magistrate and his party closed their eyes, but not until they had all seen, at some distance off, the figures of two men seated on two steeds.

It was but a transient glimpse that they obtained of them, and then they disappeared.

After that flash the darkness seemed doubly dense.

"Did you see those men?" the magistrate asked as soon as the crash of the thunder that followed the flash of lightning was over.

"We did—we did!"

"Then they are the rascals, depend upon it, who have been creating so much disturbance. And now I come to think of it, I feel pretty sure I know who they are."

In spite of their uncomfortable situation, everyone present was anxious to hear more from the magistrate's lips.

"I have received intelligence," he said, "that the notorious Jonathan Wild and his villainous companion Mr. Noakes have penetrated some distance into the country. I have not heard of them being within miles and miles of

this place; but all trace has been lost of them up to the present moment. Now I feel convinced that they are found."

"Then," said one, "if it was Jonathan Wild, I should fancy the fall of the mill was no accident, but that he had contrived to bring down the fabric with the intention of burying us beneath it."

"It is quite possible," said the magistrate, "though I do not think so. But come, my friends, forward—forward! I shall lose no time in transmitting the intelligence of what I have seen. The police officers shall know without delay; and depend upon it, ere long these miscreants will be captured."

After speaking these words, the magistrate redoubled his speed, and in a short time reached his dwelling.

He was as good as his word, for, despite the unfavourable state of the weather, he communicated with the authorities in the proper quarter, informing them that Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes had been seen near the haunted mill, and that he had every reason to believe that they had been guilty of a fresh series of crimes.

Little did Jonathan and his associate imagine that danger was closing so closely around them.

On the contrary, as we shall see, they were congratulating themselves upon their comparative safety.

Even timid Mr. Noakes believed that for a time they might consider themselves out of danger.

But he was never before in so perilous a condition and so near losing his liberty as he was then.

But it is always so.

When we imagine ourselves most secure, we frequently find ourselves in the utmost peril.

CHAPTER DCXXVII.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES UNBURY THE TREASURE AND ARE PUZZLED HOW TO DISPOSE OF IT.

DESPITE the dread Jonathan Wild always felt during a violent storm, he nevertheless welcomed the bright flashes of lightning which ran across the meadow in the way we have already mentioned.

By the aid of these flashes of lightning he hoped to be able to see just whereabouts the horses were, and to mount them and ride off.

He scrambled through the hedge, followed by his companion, and then pausing beneath a tree, looked anxiously around him.

A bright flash of lightning showed him the two horses standing close together some distance off.

They had placed themselves side by side, as though for mutual protection and defence.

They were greatly alarmed at the conflict of the elements.

"Come, Noakes," said Wild, "there they are. Forward!"

"All right."

"Approach them with caution, however, or they will start away, and we shall have no end of trouble in capturing them."

"I know, but be quick."

"I am. Curse this rain—how it comes down, to be sure! I am wet through to the skin."

"So am I."

Upon nearing the spot where the horses stood, Wild and his companion moderated their speed.

Extending their hands, they walked forward gently, and the horses, entirely overcome with terror, suffered themselves to be captured without making a shadow of a resistance.

The two villains mounted immediately, and Jonathan was just about to ride away, when, struck by a sudden thought, he paused.

He was desirous of ascertaining whether the magistrate and his party had escaped from the mill.

"I hope they may lie there and rot!" said Wild, between his clenched teeth. "I should feel more satisfied than I do now. Curse them—curse them!"

"I think you ought to be satisfied," said Noakes.

"Are you?"

"Yes, quite."

"Then I am not."

"Do you think they will escape?"

"I can't tell; but look—look!"

The violent gust of wind already spoken of at this moment came rushing over the meadow.

When Jonathan spoke he pointed to the old mill, and his companion saw it was rocking to and fro at its foundations.

"It will fall," cried Jonathan, with a scream of exultation—"it will fall!"

"And they will escape," said Noakes.

"No, no—not so—at least, I trust not. The fragments will fall upon them and crush them!"

The mill leaned over to one side.

Breathlessly, Wild and Noakes watched it.

Then it fell bodily to the earth.

A wild, screaming laugh broke from Jonathan Wild's lips.

"It is done," he said—"it is done! I am revenged!"

"No, no!"

"I tell you I am! They must be every one dead or else writhing in agony!"

"No, no," said Noakes again. "Wait for the next flash of lightning, and you will see them."

Jonathan did wait.

But only for about a moment.

Then a flash came, and showed him that his companion had spoken the truth.

Grashing his teeth together in impotent rage, he exclaimed:

"Yes, they by some miracle have escaped me this time! But I should like to have the heart's blood of all of them!"

"What do you intend to do now?" said Noakes.

"Wait a moment—wait a moment. I should like to observe their motions."

"But they may see us."

"Never mind if they do. They will not know us."

"They might do so."

"I am not afraid. Keep an eye upon them. Let us see where they go."

Disregarding the rain, they remained in just the same positions, watching the figures of the magistrate and his party as they fled rapidly over the meadows.

"They have seen us," said Noakes, at length—"I am sure they have seen us!"

"Never mind if they have!" was Wild's reply. "Let us watch them out of sight."

They did so.

Then Noakes cried:

"Come, Mr. Wild, let us quit this neighbourhood—let us be off. It's unsafe to stay here any longer."

"But the treasure?"

"What treasure?"

"That we have buried."

"What of that?"

"Is it possible you do not comprehend?"

"I do not. Is it not safe?"

"I doubt it."

"Why?"

"Has not the mill fallen? And you remember that the shadow of one of the sails pointed to the spot where the treasure lay."

"Of course it did."

"Well, now the mill has gone, we can make use of the mark no longer."

"But we might remember the place."

"Possibly we might; but now, I fancy, the people about here will not rest until they have dug up every portion of the mill. In doing this, they might discover the treasure."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; or they might take it into their heads to cultivate this field. If so, it would be discovered then."

"Mr. Wild."

"What?"

"We must remove it."

"I have come to the same conclusion myself."

"Yes, we must remove it, and to-night, too."

"I can't think," said Jonathan, "how it was that I consented to bury the money in so insecure a place. It was your impatience, Noakes."

"You consented."

"I know I did; but now we will unearth it."

"At once?"

"Yes, at once."

"But the rain?"

"D—n the rain! It will give over in awhile."

"And there is no one about, think you?"

"I am tolerably sure of it; but there may in a couple of hours or so."

"Then," said Noakes, "let us get the treasure up by all means."

They moved forward as he spoke, and entered the adjoining field.

Although such a short time had elapsed since the treasure had been buried, they experienced much difficulty in finding out the precise spot.

Now that the mill had fallen into an undistinguishable heap, the whole appearance of the place seemed changed.

They could scarcely take upon themselves to say where the place had been and in what direction the sails were spread.

Jonathan wished that he had not taken quite so much pains to make the spot where he had buried the treasure look so much like the remainder of the meadow; indeed, he feared that for once in his life he had been too clever.

At last, however, after taking up the earth in many wrong places, they chanced upon the right.

The money was divided equally between them, and then they went towards their steeds.

"What are we to do with it?" asked Noakes.

"That's a matter for further consideration," returned Wild. "We cannot carry it about with us, that is clear."

To this Noakes assented.

"We need be in no particular hurry," continued Wild; "we are as safe here as we can hope to be."

"But you will not linger in this neighbourhood?"

"No; I intend to add to our store of wealth to-night, if I possibly can."

"But you will run no great risk?"

"No more than is necessary to obtain what I require. Let us talk first of concealing the treasure."

"I am quite willing."

"Can you think of any suitable place?"

"No, Mr. Wild, I leave it to you."

"Of course you do—I know that; and then, if anything goes wrong, you will say it has been all my fault."

"I could suggest nothing but burying it somewhere."

"No," returned Jonathan, "it is in the earth that we must hide it—nowhere else."

"Then it seems to me we have only to decide upon the spot."

"That's it; but the point is most important."

"Certainly; I know all depends upon it."

"All, for if we were to lose this treasure we should have great difficulty in making up the amount."

Mr. Noakes was even more anxious than Wild himself that the treasure should be safely deposited somewhere, therefore he racked his brains endeavouring to decide upon some secure place.

This was no easy matter, however, and Jonathan Wild was equally at fault.

At length, after a long pause, during which they had gone several miles, Noakes said:

"Mr. Wild."

"What?"

"You have buried money before?"

"I have. I told you so."

"Yes; and you also stated that you had unburied it. Well, now, was all the money that you buried quite safe?"

"Yes, in every instance."

"And what kind of places did you select?"

"Generally beneath the roots of some tree."

"Then had we not better repeat what has been successful before?"

"I have been thinking of it myself."

"Suppose we divide it into four portions, and bury it beneath four trees in different places."

"That would be making doubly sure," said Jonathan; "and if, by the time we have gone a mile further, we can neither of us think of any better plan, why, we will adopt that."

Noakes again relapsed into silence.

Although they did not make a headlong speed, yet they got over the ground in capital style.

Their horses were well rested and refreshed, and required no urging forward; they simply allowed the reins to be loosed, and let the animals go at their own rate.

At length, however, when about twenty miles distant from the inn, Jonathan Wild somewhat abruptly reined-in his horse.

CHAPTER DCXXXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD COMMITS A ROBBERY ON THE HIGHWAY.

"WHAT NOW?" asked Noakes, as he followed Wild's example.

"Have you thought of anything better?"

"No."

"Nor I."

"Then what do you intend to do?"

"Why, as we seem to have reached a lonely part of the country, and a part where we have never been before—"

"And nearer to the sea-coast?" interjected Noakes.

"Yes, as you say, nearer to the sea-shore."

"Well?"

"It is well, for we will divide the treasure into four parts, and bury them somewhere here."

By this time the storm had died away, and the moon was struggling with the clouds that obscured her lustre.

A dim, hazy light was diffused over the landscape, being, in fact, just sufficient for Jonathan's purpose—it suited him much better than the full moonlight would have done.

He sat for several moments attentively observing the appearance of the spot.

At no great distance was a knoll, upon the top of which a large oak tree was growing.

Round about it, and distant perhaps about twenty yards, were four other trees.

"There they are," said Jonathan—"those are the trees. We cannot fail to know this spot again, and beyond a doubt the money will be quite secure."

"I think so too."

"Then let us set about burying it at once. You can work as well as I, and we shall perform the labour in half the time."

Both alighted, and the plan they had agreed upon was carried out.

As they were so ill provided with tools, a considerable length of time was occupied by the operation.

At last it was finished, the turf carefully patted down, and then, with a feeling of satisfaction at their hearts, they mounted their horses once more.

Another gallop across the open country brought them to the high-road, and, after a brief deliberation, Jonathan Wild resolved to take his way along it.

At first, Noakes was terrified at the idea.

But he was reconciled to it eventually, by being told that it led directly to the coast.

He was exceedingly anxious to get near to the sea, for he fancied if they were hard pressed by their foes they should at least stand a better chance of escape.

If they got on board some little vessel and crossed over either to Germany or France, they would be safe, and after awhile might return and obtain whatever money they had buried.

Something like the same idea appeared to fill Wild's mind.

It was possible that he was beginning to think that his wisest course was to consult his own safety entirely, and to abandon all those schemes of revenge he had so long cherished.

But this, judging from his previous character, seemed improbable, if not impossible.

He was a man who had lived but with one idea.

That idea was—revenge.

He had kept it constantly before him, and under its influence had performed almost incredible deeds.

If he had no revenge to seek, what had he to live for?

The aim and end of life would be gone.

This is a point that will be settled shortly.

All we have to do is to follow Jonathan Wild and chronicle his proceedings.

It is by acts alone that such a man can be judged.

With some terror, Mr. Noakes perceived that upon gaining the high-road, Jonathan Wild carefully examined the primings of his pistols.

He then consigned the weapons to his belt with an air of satisfaction.

In fact, he gave utterance to a low chuckle.

Noakes feared to ask any question.

He knew full well the answer would be disagreeable enough to him.

But Jonathan Wild was inclined to be communicative.

"Noakes," he said.

"Well, what is it?"

"Are your pistols in good order?"

"I think so."

"Well, look and see."

"For what purpose will they be required?"

"Who can tell? Take care that your firearms are always in readiness. Examine them now."

Not daring to refuse, Noakes obeyed.

He found that the primings had been shaken out of both.

He re-primed them, and then Wild exclaimed

"Forward! To-night I will show you what I intend to do."

"You will not rob anyone on the highway?"

"Why not?"

"Because—"

"Because what? Speak out; let me know your objections at once."

"Because it would have the effect of attracting attention to our proceedings."

"Bah!"

"We have shaken off the officers, that I firmly believe, and I don't wish again to have them at our heels."

"Neither do I; but at the same time I am resolved that that treasure shall be increased, and I will tell you how I intend to do it."

"I can guess."

"Very well. I ask you to take no active part in whatever I may do. Remain behind and in readiness to afford me assistance if I require it."

"Remember your last adventure. Remember—"

"I shall never forget it—curse you! You had better not serve me that trick again! I tell you at once to beware!"

"I could not help it; it was your fault, and entirely your fault—you know that perfectly well!"

"Listen—listen!"

"To what?"

"I can hear a traveller approaching. It's a strange hour of the night to be abroad. He has money, depend upon it. At any rate, we'll see."

"Is it of any use for me to ask you to forego your intention?"

"None whatever."

"You would be deaf to every remonstrance—every appeal of common sense?"

"Yes. Back your horse beneath the shadow of the hedgerow, as I do, and remain silent until I call upon you for assistance."

Noakes obeyed, though he trembled in every limb.

The sounds of some horse coming along the road at rather a rapid rate became extremely distinct.

Jonathan Wild grasped a pistol.

Then suddenly a horseman appeared in sight.

Wild rode at once into the centre of the roadway.

"Hold!" he cried in a loud voice—"hold!"

The traveller was somewhat alarmed by Jonathan's sudden appearance, so was his steed, for it swerved, and would have galloped off at a breakneck pace had not Jonathan Wild caught hold of the bridle and restrained it.

"Now, then," he cried, roughly, with an oath, "give me all that you carry about you, or, as sure as you now live, I'll blow your brains out!"

Finding himself thus assailed and thus addressed, the traveller, by a sudden movement, drew a pistol from one of the holsters.

He levelled it, and fired almost immediately.

Had it not been for the sudden blow by which Jonathan knocked the barrel of the pistol upwards, he must have received a serious wound.

"Curse you!" he said, wrathfully—"take that!"

He fired as he spoke.

The traveller crouched down in the saddle, and strove to avoid the bullet.

But in vain.

With a wild, gasping cry, he fell backwards on to the horse, and then slipped into the roadway.

Jonathan released his hold upon the bridle of the now thoroughly terrified creature.

With a snort of terror it bounded forward, and was quickly lost to sight in the darkness.

Jonathan dismounted, leaving Noakes to attend to his steed.

Going up to the prostrate form, he saluted it with a heavy kick, as he said:

"Get up, will you? Don't lie shamming there! Give me your gold!"

A groan was the only reply he received.

He dealt another kick, and repeated his demand.

This time he received no reply whatever.

"I suppose you would put me to the trouble of taking it myself?" he growled.

He stooped down while speaking, and rifled the traveller's pockets with great dexterity and speed.

There was but little to repay him for his trouble.

He glanced into the traveller's face, and he knew in a moment by its expression that the man was dead.

"Obstinate fool!" said Jonathan, "to part with your life sooner than the trifling sum you carried about with you! Well, you had your choice!"

He was about to return to his companion, when he was struck with a fresh thought.

He turned back, and, going up to the dead body, rolled it over and over with his foot until it reached the edge of a ditch that ran by the roadside.

When it was in this position, one more kick was sufficient to cause it to roll over.

With a splash, it sank into the stagnant waters, and the rank weeds that grew there in great luxuriance again raised themselves, and, beyond a slight agitation of the water, no traces of the violent deed remained.

Then he strode across the road, and remounted his steed.

Mr. Noakes did not speak, or make any inquiry about the amount of the booty.

"Come," said Wild, "there is no need for us to linger about this spot. Quick—onward!"

Noakes obeyed, still without speaking.

"What are you so infernally silent about?" asked Wild at length, in an angry voice. "Why don't you speak?"

"Because I am tired of doing so," was the reply. "You are mad—you must be mad, or you would not be so deaf to reason and blind to prudence as you are!"

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD RESOLVES UPON A BOLD STROKE TO OBTAIN MORE BOOTY.

"WHAT do you mean?"

"What I say."

"That I am mad?"

"Yes."

"Why, what makes you think so?"

"I think it is quite clear by your acts."

"My acts?"

"Yes. Who but a madman would have acted in the way you have done now?"

"In stopping the traveller?"

"Not particularly in stopping him, but murdering him."

"It was his own fault."

"There may have been provocation, but you should think of the consequences to yourself."

"Still harping on the same string."

"You need not call me a coward, because there is no boldness in setting prudence at defiance in the way you have."

"But I tell you I could not help it."

"You fired."

"I know I did, but it was only shot for shot."

"Very well; but have we not with great difficulty shaken off the police officers who for so long stuck close to our heels?"

"It seems like it."

"It is so, and, instead of taking advantage of this circumstance as you ought, you are committing just such acts as will bring them on your track again."

Jonathan Wild was well aware of this himself.

He had yielded to an ungovernable impulse when he fired at the traveller.

When the deed was done, however—when he saw the dead body on the roadway—he cursed his precipitation.

But although he was inclined to admit this to himself, he would not openly confess it to Mr. Noakes.

"Do you think," continued the latter, "that what you have just done can pass without comment?"

"Be silent—I wish to hear no more!"

"You asked me to speak, and now that I have begun I will not cease."

"Beware!"

"I am no longer afraid of you, Jonathan Wild; I am growing more and more desperate every hour. The worst you could do to me would be to kill me, and my life lately has been such a curse to me that death would be a welcome relief."

"Then, if that is the case, how is it that you are so anxious to take care of yourself?"

"Because I can see the possibility—the certainty—of leaving England. When I am once out upon the ocean—when I see the shores receding—then I shall feel safer."

"But for the present you are in my power," said Wild, "and I don't intend to release you. I tell you I am sick of this life, and as soon as I can get together enough money for my purpose, I will forego my long-cherished revenge and leave England."

"But if you act as you have done, can't you see that you will bring such a number of police officers at your heels that escape will be impossible?"

"No, I don't see that. We have thwarted them before, and shall again."

"But because we have succeeded, that is no reason why we should not fail."

"You would rather look forward to failure than success."

"I would be cautious in my movements—nothing more."

"Well, the job has been neatly managed," added Wild; "scarcely a trace of the traveller could be found—he is out of sight."

"Yes, but what a narrow escape we had at the mill—how near we were to being discovered!"

"But we were not discovered—we escaped; and with that knowledge I am satisfied to remain content."

"But I am not."

"What would you have, then?"

"It is useless for me to speak."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I have felt that for some time—quite useless. I have given up all hopes of bringing you to reason."

Wild laughed scornfully.

"This is rich," he said—"it amuses me much."

"Will you answer me one question?"

"What is it?"

"About how many miles are we from the coast?"

"You want to know that?"

"Yes."

"Particularly?"

"Most particularly."

"Well, then, I should say about——"

"About how far?"

"Forty——"

"Forty miles?"

"Yes."

"No more?"

"I can't say for a mile, more or less."

"Well, then, I breathe again."

"You feel safer?"

"I do."

"Well, Noakes, this wrangling is amusing; but the worst of it is, it does no good."

"I hope so."

"But it does not. Now, if you like, I will tell you what I intend to do."

"I am bound to listen."

"Very well, then—to-night I intend to make a bold effort to obtain a large booty."

Noakes groaned.

"What are you groaning at?"

"The danger."

"Is anything to be done without it?"

"Well, well—go on with your plan! What is it you have to propose?"

"Nothing more than that."

"You have made no arrangements, then?"

"No, none whatever; I shall allow myself to be guided entirely by circumstances."

"Then you have not made up your mind in the least degree?"

"Certainly not; but I can give you one word of consolation."

"What is that?"

"If I can obtain such a booty as I hope for to-night, we will go direct to the sea-shore, and in twenty-four hours shall be out of danger."

"I dare not suffer myself to look upon such a prospect as that," said Noakes.

"You may as well. But stay—do you see that building over there?"

"Which one?"

"That church."

"I do; what of it?"

"Well, then, it is quite possible I shall find there just such a booty as I seek."

"In that church?"

"Yes."

"Would you rob a church?"

"Yes,—why not? It is but a building erected by human hands, is it?"

"No, no—nothing else!" said Noakes, stammeringly.

He had a superstitious dread of places of worship at night, and the idea of committing sacrilege was one from which he instinctively shrank.

"I will warrant there are rare articles of silver to be found. I never knew a church yet that was not furnished with plenty of plate. I hope that church will be no exception."

"Then you are quite in earnest?"

"Quite—never more so in my life."

"But how shall you proceed? If you do obtain this plate, what good would the communion service be to you under your present circumstances?"

"Wait until I have got it," said Wild—"it will be time enough to settle that question then."

The church to which Jonathan Wild alluded was situated at no great distance.

It was a massive, ancient-looking edifice, such as can be seen in many parts of England at the present day.

There was a village at some distance, and situated in a commanding position was a mansion, probably belonging to some nobleman.

As the night had grown much lighter, Jonathan Wild was able to see all this, and he immediately drew his own conclusions from it.

Such a church as that he fancied would be just the one wherein to find a more than ordinary display of communion-plate.

The lord of the manor would beyond a doubt take a great interest in church affairs, and would at his own expense provide a quantity of silver plate.

At any rate, Jonathan determined to enter the church and ascertain what could be had.

The nearer he came the more he liked the appearance of things.

"Yes, Noakes," he said, at length—"nerve yourself for one effort, and that's all I shall require of you. I am sure there is a little fortune to be picked up inside that building. Why should we not have it? As soon as it is in our possession, we will place it in a convenient spot, return for the other treasure, and embark for Holland."

"Such a prospect as that would tempt me to do much," said Noakes, with an air of resolution. "But I am sick of these promises—they have been made so often, and have produced no result."

"Well, I speak now plainly and clearly. All is contingent upon the booty. If we obtain it, then there will be an end to this roving, dangerous life."

"Then, Mr. Wild, I will accompany you—I will join with you in this enterprise."

"That's right."

"I will assist you to the very best of my abilities—I will render you what help I can."

"That's the way!" said Wild. "If you would but cooperate with me, we should not have half so much trouble—besides, in this case, there is but a trifling amount of danger."

"How is that?"

"Why, no one will live in the church. The only difficulty will be to effect an entrance. When we have done that, we shall have the place entirely to ourselves to do just as we like. We can take our time, and, when we leave, it will be our own fault if we do not take every valuable with us."

"The night is far advanced."

"I know that; but still there is plenty of time left for us to carry out this undertaking. Come, spur your horse—let us make a little better speed!"

Noakes obeyed, and at a much more rapid rate than they had been travelling at, the two villains made their way towards the church about which they had been speaking.

It really seemed as though, by some strong effort, Mr. Noakes had determined to throw off all those terrors which usually oppressed him.

He appeared to be endowed with the courage of desperation.

On this occasion he would do all and dare all he could under the impression that there would be no other time when he would be called upon to assist in a similar scheme.

CHAPTER CXXX.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES SUCCEEDED IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE CHURCH.

A FEW minutes' ride brought Wild and Noakes to the stone wall which bounded the churchyard.

This was much too high for the horses to be able to overleap it.

Such a thing was quite out of the question, so they looked about them for some convenient and retired spot where they could place them in safety while they carried on their operations inside the building.

At length they decided upon a spot which they imagined would answer the end they had in view, and having settled matters so far, they looked around for some means of gaining the enclosure.

The walls were of smooth stone, so that without a ladder, or some other scaling apparatus, they could not be surmounted.

"The gate," said Wild—"there must be a gate. Come round; we will climb over that."

They skirted the boundary wall of the churchyard hastily, and presently came to some large iron gates.

These were of an elaborate pattern, and although the top was formed of numerous iron spikes about a foot in length, both believed it would be easy to climb over them.

Jonathan Wild set the example.

There were many places to place the feet, and the iron bars themselves were sufficient to grasp hold of.

In a very brief space of time indeed Jonathan climbed over this obstacle, and stood in safety on the other side.

With more care and caution, Mr. Noakes followed his example.

"Crouch down," said Wild. "Don't stand upright—run in that position—there will not be so much danger of being seen then."

Anything in the shape of precaution Mr. Noakes was glad to take, therefore he obeyed Jonathan willingly enough, and doubling himself up into a strange attitude, he ran hastily towards the church.

The door was furnished with a large old-fashioned porch, and as soon as this was gained the two villains felt that they were secure from observation.

It was quite dark underneath this porch, and from the distance they must have been invisible.

Although they fully and entirely believed that they had the place entirely to themselves, yet both Wild and Noakes instinctively sank their voices to a whisper.

Why they should do this was hard indeed to say, and yet both were unconscious of it.

There was certainly no one anywhere near to overhear their voices had they raised them.

But a feeling of awe, which they experienced as soon as ever they got beneath the shadow of the sacred building, compelled them to be silent.

"We will just try the door," said Wild, in a whisper. "Not that I expect we shall be able to gain admission by it, for I am ill provided with tools. I expect we shall have to get through a window."

To this Noakes made no reply, and Jonathan, stepping forward, soon reached the door.

He stooped down to examine the keyhole.

In doing so he placed his hand against the door, and pressed lightly upon it. To his surprise, he found it yield to his touch.

He started to his feet.

In a voice of subdued exultation, he said:

"Why, Noakes, fortune favours us indeed!"

"How so? What have you discovered?"

"Why, the sexton has neglected to lock the church door. We have only to push it open, and enter."

Noakes felt uneasy, though without knowing why.

He had all along made up his mind that they would have considerable resistance to overcome.

Now, upon finding that there was no obstruction to his progress, he experienced a feeling of doubt and hesitation.

"That is very strange," he said, at length.

"Very—but most fortunate for us," was Wild's reply.

"Follow me—we shall have much to do, depend upon it, before we obtain the communion-plate."

He pushed open the church door as he spoke.

The hinges creaked dismally, and the sound echoed and re-echoed through the vast building.

"Hush!" he said.

And then he stopped.

Reassured by the silence which prevailed, he beckoned his companion to follow him.

The door was not pushed wide open, and yet wide enough to allow them to enter.

Therefore, without venturing to raise the creaking noise again, he slipped inside.

Mr. Noakes followed him quickly.

He was terrified to remain alone.

At first the interior of the church seemed profoundly dark.

After waiting a second or two, however, Wild fancied, as he looked towards the chancel, that he could see a faint reflected light.

He grasped his companion somewhat tightly by the arm.

"Noakes—Noakes!" he said.

"What is it?"

"Look there—straight before you!"

"Yes, yes—I am."

"What do you see?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?—are you sure? Look again!"

"What can you see, Mr. Wild?" asked Noakes, already terrified.

"Something like a faint gleam of light."

"Yes, yes—I can see it now."

"You have no doubt about it?"

"None whatever."

"What can it mean, then?"

"I can only think it means that there are others in the church besides ourselves."

"Yes—but who?"

"That I know no better than yourself."

"The door being unlocked is now accounted for."

"Yes, certainly, if anyone is here. But who could be at such an hour as this?"

"As I said before, I know no better than yourself."

"Then we must find out."

"No, no!"

"No, say you?"

"Yes—I think if there is anyone here, we had better forego our plan."

"Forego it?"

"Well, for this night at least."

"No, no—I am determined to find out who is here! Follow me silently on tiptoe—don't make a sound!"

"I dare not."

"Dare not?"

"No, I am terrified!"

"Then remain where you are."

Jonathan glided forward like some evil spirit up the aisle.

To remain there standing alone was, however, in Mr. Noakes's estimation, a thousand times more dreadful than to accompany his bold associate.

Therefore, after a momentary pause, he summoned up courage sufficient to follow in his steps.

As he proceeded further and further along the aisle, the faint gleam of light which had at first attracted Wild's attention grew stronger and brighter.

Where it came from was yet a mystery he could not solve.

His curiosity was greatly excited by what he saw.

Onward—onward he went, until within a short distance of the communion railings.

Then he discovered the source from which the light emanated.

One of the large stones with which the middle aisle of the church was paved had been raised from its setting.

It was now fixed in a slanting position.

It had been raised to an angle of about forty-five degrees, and then propped up by some strong object, probably the crowbar which had been used in raising it.

It was from beneath this stone that the light came.

Jonathan upon making this discovery advanced with renewed caution.

Then on reaching the edge of the abyss he peeped down.

By the faint, dim, reflected light, he saw that there were some steep stone steps covered with sawdust, evidently leading to a vault.

And now even Jonathan Wild hesitated whether he should go any further—whether he should interfere with this affair.

A little reflection, however, brought him to the conclusion that whoever was in the vault had some sinister object in being there.

While he waited in doubt as to what he should do next, Wild listened.

A faint grating noise reached his ears.

Some one was at work, and making no more noise over what he was about than he could possibly help.

At length Wild determined to descend.

He touched Noakes, so as to convey to him an idea of his intention.

Then, with the greatest cautiousness, he insinuated his body between the flooring and the stone slab that had been raised.

His feet sank deeply into the sawdust upon the steps.

It was so deep that he felt sure he should be able to descend without making even the faintest sound.

Again Noakes felt in doubt as to what he should do.

The idea of remaining where he was, in the aisle of the church, while his companion entered the vault, presented to him a thousand terrors.

But he had two evils to choose between, and for the life of him he could not make up his mind which to adopt.

In this state of uncertainty, he watched Wild slowly and silently descend the steps.

"No, no!" murmured Noakes. "I must—I will wait here and watch the result. I dare not descend."

He laid himself down at full length on the stone pavement, and looked down, being anxious in the extreme to know what would be the result of Jonathan's temerity.

CHAPTER DCXXXI.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES HAVE SOME STRANGE ADVENTURES IN THE CHURCH.

JONATHAN WILD managed to reach the bottom of the steps without, as he believed, having made noise enough to attract the attention of whoever might be in the vault.

Then he leaned forward, in order to obtain, if possible, a view of the interior.

He fancied that if he advanced further he should be seen.

He was able to assume such a position that he commanded a view of the whole of the vault, while at the same time he exposed only the upper part of his head.

The first thing that attracted his attention was the light.

This was a lantern—the door of which had been opened so that the light might be more diffused—which had been placed by the side of a coffin on a shelf.

The vault was lined all round with these ghastly objects, which were ranged with methodical regularity upon shelves just wide enough to admit them.

It was only a passing glance, however, that Jonathan Wild gave to these objects.

His attention was directly enchained by something else.

On the floor of the vault, and nearly in the centre of it, was a large-sized coffin.

The outer case had been made of lead, and this had been carefully soldered.

Now, however, it had been rudely cut and twisted.

Kneeling down by the side of this coffin, and working busily at the lid, was a man whose countenance Wild

could not distinguish, for it was turned so that the light did not fall upon it.

Jonathan must have made some slight noise, for the man suddenly ceased his work and assumed a listening attitude.

Wild shrank back.

But yet he contrived to peep into the vault.

He saw the man's face.

It was sinister-looking in the extreme.

There was something familiar in the features, Jonathan thought.

In fact, he was certain he had seen the man before.

Where, he could not for the life of him remember.

"What was that?" said the man, in a suppressed voice.

It was strange he should ask such a question, for there was no living person except himself and Jonathan Wild who could reply to it.

But the fact is, this man yielded to the impulse to speak half aloud which so often comes over us when we are alone and in some strange, terrifying place.

He had heard some triling noise, and it had disturbed him.

The silence of the tomb now prevailed.

Jonathan could hear his own heart beat.

"It's nothing!" the man said, at length, in a voice little above a whisper, yet it could be heard with the greatest distinctness in that silent vault. "It's nothing. This old church is full of odd noises. Why should I be afraid? Dead bodies can't hurt me, can they? Certainly not! Then here goes again. Confound it all! I wonder what they want to screw coffin-lids down so tight for?"

This last sentence let Wild into two important secrets.

In the first place, it proclaimed the identity of the speaker.

Wild remembered him now.

His features baffled remembrance, but not the voice.

"That's Long Joe," said Wild, mentally, "and he wants something out of that coffin."

Long Joe was one of the most noted thieves in London.

Wild was surprised to find him so far from the metropolis.

He had either been out of luck, or else business of very great importance had brought him here.

Which of the two it might be, Jonathan neither knew nor cared.

But he thought something would happen well worth his while to stay and see.

Having got over his temporary alarm, Long Joe renewed his attack upon the lid of the coffin.

He worked with a will; but it was a rich man's coffin, and composed of the strongest materials.

At length, however, Long Joe's labours were rewarded.

There was a cracking, splitting sound, and then off flew the lid of the coffin.

Long Joe rose to his feet.

"That's ever so far," he said. "Now for the light."

He advanced to the shelf on which he had placed his lantern, and removed it.

Returning to the coffin, he held the lantern up above his head, so that the beams were well diffused.

But he directed the principal rays downward.

"Yes," said Long Joe, "there he lies, sure enough! Well, well—we must all come to it some day or other. But what a fool he must be to have all these things buried with him—as though he could take them away with him! Ah, well! I suppose he thought, if he could not enjoy the wealth himself, no one else should. But he's mistaken! Here am I, Long Joe, and I mean to have all! I never did rob a dead body before in my life; but, however, why should it matter? Here goes!"

Wild saw Long Joe put his hand inside the coffin.

He tugged away at something for a moment—then produced it.

"Number one!" he said. "A capital ring that! A diamond too, and of the first water, I'll be bound! Now to see what else the old fellow has!"

Long Joe placed the ring on his finger.

Then again he put his hand inside the coffin.

Some half-dozen more rings were then produced and transferred to the robber's fingers.

Jonathan watched every movement as a cat might watch a mouse.

"Let him go on until he has done," he thought; "he is only saving me trouble. I don't want to do the disagreeable work."

Wild was very well content to remain a spectator.

Long Joe went on with his task.

Valuable after valuable was torn from the rigid body of the dead man, and placed on his own.

"Now for that gold chain," he said. "That's the only thing left, I do believe! I'll just take that, and be off."

Taking off the gold chain did not seem to be a very easy task.

But he tugged away, and at last it was in his possession.

"Now, Sir George Adley," he said, addressing the dead man, "you can rest in peace so far as I am concerned. I am done with you, and I'll warrant the loss of these jewels won't affect you now. Good-bye, Sir George! Your silly whim has made me rich. My fortune is made now. Good-bye!"

There was something grim and odd in the idea of thus holding a conversation with a corpse.

Long Joe turned round and prepared to leave the vault.

Little did he dream of the surprise that was in store for him.

Little did he think that he had been taking all this trouble to enrich another.

He did not trouble himself about the coffin.

He did not even lift the lid off the floor of the vault and replace it in its proper position.

He left everything just as it was, so that whoever came down into the vault would make an alarming discovery.

"Now I am off," he said, as he took up the lamp. "I rather think I have managed this bit of business very well. It's capital! I might say very capital——"

Long Joe suddenly stopped in the middle of a word.

He stopped in his advance towards the steps leading out of the vault.

At first he stood perfectly still.

Then he staggered back several paces, the lantern seeming as though it would fall from his grasp.

His eyes glared wildly about him.

He was a prey to the utmost alarm.

Jonathan Wild had stepped from his hiding-place full into the light of the lantern.

"Long Joe!" he said.

"That's me. Who are you?"

He was beginning to recover his courage.

The first shock which the sudden appearance of some one had given him was passing away.

Jonathan scowled fearfully when he found that this man did not recognise him.

His appearance must indeed have greatly altered, for in days not long past this very man—Long Joe—used frequently to come to him.

"I'll trouble you," exclaimed Jonathan, levelling a pistol at the man's breast—"I'll trouble you to hand over all those things you have taken from that dead body."

"Oh, will you?"

"Yes; don't trifle with me, you will find the consequences serious to yourself if you do. Beware! Give me all, I say, and I will spare your life."

"How generous you are. But stand off, I have got a pistol as well as yourself, and I know how to use it!"

"Very likely," said Wild, calmly; "but if I see you attempt to draw any weapon forth, that very instant I will fire!"

Long Joe shook a little.

He did not like the idea of coming to this end in the vault, and he was overawed by Jonathan's resolute manner.

"Who are you?" he said. "You've got an odd voice, and somehow I seem to recognise it. If it wasn't impossible, I should say you were——"

"Who?"

"Oh, it's impossible."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Then my name is Jonathan Wild."

"D—n me if I didn't think so!" exclaimed Long Joe—"though I could hardly believe it. Take that, you tyrannical villain—take that! I will have the reward that's offered for you!"



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES SEEK SHELTER WITH THE CHARCOAL-BURNER.]

As he spoke, he first of all flung the lamp with great violence at Jonathan.

It missed its mark, for Wild moved just at that moment.

Heedless of this, Long Joe rushed forward.

In another second he was grappling and wrestling with Jonathan Wild.

It was an awful fight in the dark, and its horrors were aggravated by the nature of the place they were in.

The lantern struck with great violence against the wall, and was smashed to atoms.

The light was extinguished, and the darkness in the vault something terrible to think of.

It was a struggle for life or death, and both men knew it.

Jonathan was aware what would be the consequences if Long Joe got the better of the struggle, and that indicated. No. 137.—BLUESKIN.

vidual felt quite certain that if Wild was the victor he could expect no mercy.

And so, with the fury of two wild beasts, they struggled, and fought, and wrestled in the vault.

Their uncertain steps brought them to the coffin that was lying on the floor.

They fell over it, making a tremendous crash.

But Long Joe was undermost.

He uttered a yell of fright upon finding that he had fallen over the corpse.

"Mercy—mercy!" he gasped.

Jonathan only clutched him by the throat.

Then, by that means, he raised Long Joe's head, and banged it down with tremendous force upon the sharp edge of the coffin.

"Murder!" said Joe, in as loud a tone of voice as he could. "Murder—murder!"

Jonathan raised his head a second time, and again brought it down with frightful force upon the corner of the coffin.

Joe's voice grew fainter.

The fury of a demon then took possession of Jonathan Wild.

With a wonderful amount of strength and energy, he banged the back of Joe's head upon the sharp wood-work, until the sound produced by the concussion was no longer clear and sharp, as at first, but dull and soft.

CHAPTER DCXXXII.

JONATHAN WILD TRANSFERS THE BOOTY FROM LONG JOE'S POCKETS TO HIS OWN.

LONG JOE was dead.

The back of his skull was beaten into a soft, spongy mass.

But heedless of this, and quite carried away by a demoniac fury, Jonathan Wild continued to strike his head upon the corner of the coffin until he was compelled to pause from sheer exhaustion.

Then he heard a voice.

At first he did not recognise it.

"Mr. Wild—Mr. Wild!"

It was Noakes who spoke.

"Well, what now—what is it?"

"Oh, you are there, Mr. Wild. Do I indeed hear your voice? I am frightened to death!"

Wild growled out something by way of a reply, and dashed the drops of perspiration from his face.

"Confound this fool," he said; "he may be the means of getting me into no end of trouble; but I will see—I will see!"

In the heated state of his blood, Jonathan Wild was free from all superstitious terrors and fancies.

Without the least hesitation he stooped down over the body of the dead man, and began to feel in his pockets.

"I must have a light," he said—"a light to see what I am about, and if I know Long Joe, as I think I do, he is sure to carry the means of procuring a light about with him.

An ejaculation of satisfaction at this moment escaped Wild's lips.

In the pockets of the sacrilegious burglar he found a small package of what were then known as thieves' matches.

Although it was dark, Jonathan managed by the aid of the bottle of phosphorus to obtain a light.

The match sputtered for a while until the wood-work fairly caught light, and then it sent forth a dim radiance in the vault.

Jonathan went towards the spot where the lantern had struck against the wall.

Nothing but fragments remained of it.

But he searched among them, and was rewarded for his trouble by the discovery of a small piece of candle.

It was somewhat bruised and broken, but the wick was intact, and readily caught light.

He lifted it up, searching for some place where he could fix it, so as to have his hands at liberty.

It was necessary to find a place where the light would be equally diffused.

Mr. Noakes again called out.

"Hold your row," said Wild, angrily; "if you want anything, come down!"

"I—I dare not!"

"Then remain where you are!"

"But I am terrified!"

"Peace—trouble me no more."

"But what has happened?" asked Mr. Noakes. "Tell me what has happened?"

"Do you want to know?"

"Yes."

"Particularly?"

"Yes."

"Then come down the steps and see!"

Wild laughed a short, disagreeable laugh, and then advanced towards the body of Long Joe.

"Ah!" he said, "you're dead enough now—as dead as a nut, and I have cheated the hangman. Well, no matter, I may perhaps turn things to my advantage after all."

By the aid of the little piece of candle, which shed a dim a sickly light around the vault, Jonathan Wild searched the pockets of Long Joe.

He took from them every article of value they contained, as well as a bunch of skeleton keys, and a few other useful house-breaking tools.

With the latter Jonathan was exceedingly pleased.

"Now," he said, "all will be well, and I shall fear nothing."

He was not forgetful of the rings which he had seen Long Joe put upon his fingers, and now, with rude violence, he pulled them off, in some cases taking the skin as well.

When he had made sure that he had possessed himself of every article Long Joe had about him that could be of the least utility, Jonathan Wild rose to his feet.

Just then his eyes fell upon the corpse of the baronet, Sir George Adley.

"What a strange whim," he said, "for a man to be buried with so much wealth about him. Surely he did not desire to rest content in his grave; he might have been sure that some one would be tempted to plunder him. Perhaps he has got something more about him or in the coffin which may have escaped Long Joe's notice. I will see."

Jonathan Wild trembled a little, and rather shrank from handling the rigid corpse.

But he made up his mind to it as a disagreeable duty that had to be performed.

All his trouble, however, went for nothing.

Long Joe had been careful to possess himself of every article of value.

Then once again Wild rose to his feet, and, placing his hand by the side of his face, began to think.

"I have not forgotten the communion-plate," he murmured to himself. "I will have that, I am determined. When they discover the loss of this, the church may be searched. This vault may be entered in a day or two, and if they find it in its present state what a hue and cry will be raised. No, no—it will not do to leave things thus. I must take some precautions—it is highly necessary."

Wild reflected deeply for a few moments.

And then suddenly starting into action, he exclaimed:

"I have it. I know how to do it now!"

He turned towards the door of the vault.

"Noakes," he cried—"Noakes—where are you?"

"Here, Mr. Wild."

"Where?"

"Here."

Jonathan darted forward.

As he had guessed from the sound of his voice, Mr. Noakes was standing at the bottom of the flight of steps.

Although so terrified that he could scarcely move, curiosity had triumphed over every other consideration.

Therefore he had descended the sawdusted steps, and was about to peep into the vault when Wild called him.

Before he was aware of what he was about, Jonathan Wild had seized him by the throat, and dragged him into the vault.

He released him, and then Mr. Noakes sank down on the ground.

"Get up, fool!" said Wild, saluting him with a kick. "I have work to do."

Mr. Noakes cast a terrified glance around him.

The very place was calculated to strike a thousand terrors into his superstitious soul.

Who, then, can say what his feelings were when his eyes rested on the horrible spectacle the vault contained.

He crouched down still lower on the ground, and covered his face with his hands.

Jonathan dealt him another savage kick.

"Get up, will you," he said—"get up, I tell you—there's work for you to do!"

"Work—work? What have you been about?"

"Why, by rare accident, I have stumbled upon a treasure of considerable value, and if we can only carry off the communion-plate in safety we shall have enough to commence our voyage."

These words revived Noakes a little.

Jonathan knew they would, and that was why he uttered them.

"What treasure is it?" he asked.

"Why, that rich man chose to be buried with much of his wealth in his coffin with him. It tempted that man to break into the vault and open the coffin, as you see. I waited until he had stripped the corpse, and then I took the treasure from him."

"And you have killed him?"

"Yes, I could not help it. Self-defence compelled the act."

"That was the meaning of the struggle, then?"

"It was, cowardly wretch that you are! Had you been my true companion, you would have descended into the vault and lent me your assistance. One stroke of your arm would have put an end to the contest and saved me a world of trouble; but, as it was, you remained there and would have allowed me to perish."

"I was terrified, Mr. Wild—I was terrified!"

"Bah! you always are when there's any bold deed to be done. But I don't intend that you should escape altogether so easily."

"What's that, then, you want me to do?"

"It will not do to leave this vault in its present state. I must leave no trace behind of the deed that I have done. You must assist me to conceal it."

"But how—how?"

"Wait a little while, I will show you. I have no time for wordy argument; if we are not quick we shall have the dawn upon us before we have completed our operations."

CHAPTER DCXXXIII.

JONATHAN WILD HITS UPON AN INGENIOUS EXPEDIENT FOR DISPOSING OF THE BODY OF LONG JOE.

MR. NOAKES still crouched upon the floor, so Jonathan favoured him with another kick.

"Get up!" he said. "D—n you, get up!"

In order to escape ill-usage, Mr. Noakes unwillingly rose to his feet.

"Now," said Wild, "the first thing I want done is for the body to be pulled out of the coffin. Out with it!"

"But I dare not."

"But I say you shall! Do you think I would take all this trouble to allow you to have half a share in the benefits if you failed to do your part?"

"But, Mr. Wild—"

"No excuses—none! I will not listen to any!"

"But, Mr. Wild, I say—"

"Peace, peace—be silent. I will not listen to a word! Obey my commands, or it will be the worse for you!"

A more terrible idea than to drag a dead man out of his coffin could not possibly have been presented to the mind of Mr. Noakes.

He trembled and shook like one in an ague.

But he was overawed and intimidated by Jonathan's violent manner.

Falteringly, half-hesitatingly he approached the coffin.

"Obey!" thundered Wild—"obey! I will teach you that you have something to do! You shall not for ever take refuge in your cowardice!"

Mr. Noakes stooped down, and, conquering his repugnance as best he could, took hold of the dead body by the feet.

"Now I will help you," said Wild.

And as he spoke he raised the head.

"Now then," he continued, "up with it—out with him!"

Mr. Noakes obeyed.

But the corpse was heavy.

Straining their muscles, however, they lifted the body out.

And then Mr. Noakes wondered greatly what Wild was about to do.

"Now then," he cried, "lay hold of Long Joe. Up with him!"

"Are you going to put him into the coffin?"

"Yes."

"And what shall you do with that?"

Noakes pointed to the rigid corpse in its white wind-sheet.

"Wait a moment, and you will see," was Jonathan's reply.

Between them, then, they raised the body of Long Joe and placed him in the coffin.

He was a trifle taller or longer than the deceased baronet, and the coffin was too short for him.

But they wedged him in with angry violence.

"Now then, up with the other," Wild cried—"up with the other!"

"Up with the other?"

"Yes. Obey, and ask no questions."

Once more the corpse of Sir George Adley was lifted, and it was placed in the coffin again on the top of Long Joe.

"The lid," said Wild—"quick, the lid!"

"But—but—"

"What's the objection now?"

"You can't put it on."

"Why not?"

"Can't you see the coffin was made to hold one body only? The lid would not fit on."

"Wait a moment," said Wild, grimly—"you will see about that. Here—pick up the lid!"

Noakes complied.

It was a heavy piece of wood, and Long Joe had only slightly injured it in prizing it off.

It was placed down on the top of the coffin.

That is, it was placed as well as it would fit.

It did not rest upon the edges of the coffin, but rather upon the most prominent parts of the corpse.

"There—I told you!" said Noakes. "I knew it would not fit."

"We'll see about that. Now, then, do as I do, and you will find the lid will accommodate itself very well."

While speaking, Jonathan stepped up on to the lid of the coffin.

The mere weight of his body forced it down about an inch.

Not daring to refuse, and yet shuddering with loathing, Mr. Noakes stepped upon the other end.

"Now, then," Wild cried, "quick—jump into the air, and come down as heavily as you can. Rely upon it, it will make the lid fit somehow."

He suited the action to the word.

He jumped up, and came down with all his force upon the lid of the coffin.

There was a sickening, crushing noise, and then, upon stooping to make examination, Wild found that the lid almost fitted.

"Once more, Noakes," he said—"once more!"

Sir George Adley little thought he would be forced into such close quarters with a London thief.

"Now, then, once more!"

Again the miscreants sprang into the air, and again they came down; and although the lid did not fit exactly as it ought, yet it was almost pressed into its proper place.

Nothing now remained but to fold back the leaden case, one side of which had been cut open by Long Joe.

With a great deal of trouble, Wild flattened it out. On one side, the coffin showed scarcely any signs of having been disturbed.

"So far very good!" exclaimed Wild, with satisfaction. "I rather think I have managed that neatly. Ten to one if this is found out for years and years—if, indeed, it ever is! How people will wonder when they find two skeletons in one coffin! Ha, ha!—it is a good joke!"

Noakes shuddered.

Then Jonathan glanced around him, in order to ascertain if he could find the shelf from which the coffin had been dragged.

It was easy to decide upon this point.

Then he said to his companion:

"We have the hardest bit of work before us; but we must get it over. The coffin must be lifted on to the shelf."

"Impossible!"

"I will not admit any such word—I will not listen to it! It must be done, possible or impossible!"

His determined way lent some sort of resolution even to Mr. Noakes.

He imitated the actions of Jonathan, and stooped down.

But the coffin was as much as over their united strengths could raise.

They carried it a foot or two, and were compelled to put it down and rest.

Then again and again, until eventually, after incredible labour, they succeeded in placing it upon the shelf.

They pushed it back until it was in its proper position.

Then Wild contemplated his work with grim satisfaction.

It would indeed require something like a close scrutiny to see that that coffin had been meddled with.

He had only to restore the vault to its original condition, so that no suspicion should be excited by the appearance of anything unusual, and then all would be well—his purpose would be attained.

In the first place there was one difficulty to get over which he had not yet contemplated.

Having seen the coffin properly in its place, and the body of Long Joe comfortably disposed of, both then observed for the first time that a portion of the sawdust was soaked in the blood.

This had flowed from Long Joe's head when it had been battered against the corner of the coffin.

But there was plenty of sawdust in the vault, so Jonathan picked it up by handfuls and placed it over the stain.

The dark, ruddy patch was soon obliterated, and then, when he had raked the sawdust carefully level, and buried the fragments of the lantern in it, he believed that it would present to the casual eye no appearance of having been disturbed.

"Now," he said, "I don't care how soon I am out of this place."

"Nor I either," said Noakes.

"Come along, then. Here, wait a moment—I will take the candle. Now, follow me up the steps."

Mr. Noakes kept close indeed at the heels of his companion, for the idea seized upon him that Jonathan might attempt to shut him down in the vault and leave him there.

He took care to emerge almost at the same time as his rascally associate.

The large slab of stone which fitted over the entrance to the vault had been propped up by Long Joe with a crowbar.

This Jonathan carefully removed, and lowered the stone into its setting.

Traces of the stone having been lifted were, however, quite visible.

By accident, Noakes stumbled against several small objects on the floor.

"What's this," he said—"what's this?"

He picked them up.

Jonathan looked at them eagerly.

He saw a small quantity of mortar in a box.

It was mortar of a peculiar colour.

In fact, it matched exactly with that which was between the flagstones in the aisle of the church.

"All right," said Jonathan—"I see how it is now. We shall be able to manage now first-rate—it's capital! See, this is the way to do it! Fortune favours us indeed!"

CHAPTER DCXXXIV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES GET POSSESSION OF THE COMMUNION-PLATE.

BESIDES the little box of dark-coloured mortar, there was also a small trowel and a bottle of some transparent liquid.

With the trowel Jonathan pressed the mortar carefully between the edges of the stone, and smoothed it over, closely imitating the other stones that were around.

"What's this bottle for?" said Noakes.

"Oh, I know all about it," returned Wild. "I have been on a little expedition of this sort before, and so has Long Joe, I'll warrant!"

"What is it, then?"

"Why, it has the effect of hardening the mortar instantly. You will see I have done now, and when I pour this liquid on, the mortar will become as hard as the stone itself."

Jonathan carefully poured a little of this liquid all round the setting of the stone, and, by the time he had finished, Noakes found that the mortar was indeed as hard as stone, and no one could have told by observation that the vault had ever been opened.

He brushed away all the little fragments of mortar and dust, and then said:

"Come, Noakes, the vestry must be next!"

"Is it not too late already—?"

"No, never too late! Now that I am here, do you think I would quit the church without effecting my object? Bah, Noakes, you are a fool!"

Jonathan, carrying the little piece of candle in his hand, strode hastily down the aisle of the church.

His heavy, thick-soled boots raised many strange, reverberating echoes in the sacred edifice.

The sound alarmed Noakes, who crept along on tiptoe after his accomplice.

The door of the vestry was soon reached.

As Jonathan expected, it was locked.

But he did not care for that in the least, now that he was provided with Long Joe's burglarious implements.

He tried the skeleton keys first, and at length found one that fitted the lock of the vestry door exactly.

It creaked a little, and then opened.

"Here we are!" said Wild. "Now, Noakes, come in and shut the door. You hold the light, and I will soon get all the silver service."

Noakes, whose terror increased every moment, listened anxiously, as though he expected to hear some alarming sound.

But the silence of the very tomb itself reigned in and around the lonely country church, which surely, never since it had been built, had been so desecrated as on that eventful night.

With keen eyes, Jonathan glanced round the vestry, wondering where the plate would be most likely kept.

There were several cupboard doors in the walls.

But they were all fast.

Under the window was a large, strong wooden box of antique manufacture.

It was banded in many places with broad strips of iron, and altogether it presented the appearance of possessing great strength.

"That's it!" he said. "I would wager my life that the plate is in that box!"

"But how shall you get it open?"

"Oh! I shall do it, never fear!"

Again he made use of the skeleton keys, as they had been so serviceable to him on the former occasion.

But this time they were quite useless.

He tried one after the other, until at length, finding not a single one would suit, he flung the bunch down with an angry exclamation.

He carried the crowbar with which the slab had been propped up.

With this he thought he might be able to force the lid of the box open.

But it fitted too accurately.

There was no little crevice wherein he could insert the point of the instrument.

"What shall you do now?" asked Noakes.

"Why, not give up, of course. I have one resource left, and I know that will not fail. You will see."

Jonathan took a powder-flask from his pocket, and shook several grains into his hand.

Then, with great patience, he pressed the gunpowder into the keyhole of the chest until it was completely full.

He pressed it in tightly with one of the skeleton keys, ramming it as hard as he could.

When it was no longer possible to force in another grain, he took the candle from the hand of Mr. Noakes.

He applied the flame to the keyhole.

In a moment there was a puff of blue smoke and an explosion—not a loud one, and yet it sounded so in that silent place.

Involuntarily, Mr. Noakes stepped back several paces.

"Now hold the light again," said Wild. "Trust me, the box will open now!"

Noakes took the candle with a trembling hand.

The vestry was full of wreaths of fine blue smoke.

Jonathan eagerly made his way towards the box.

As he fully expected, the lock had been completely shattered.

One blow with his crowbar, followed by a crashing sound, and then the lid of the box fell back, revealing a treasure within that made Jonathan's eyes sparkle and glisten with avidity.

Even Mr. Noakes stepped forward, full of curiosity to look at the glittering plate.

"We'll try if we can carry all of it," said Wild—"we won't leave any behind! Wait a bit, you will see how I will manage it."

With great dexterity, Jonathan took out the pieces of plate one after the other.

He struck each one several heavy blows with the crowbar, so as to flatten it, and make it lie in the smallest possible compass.

It was previous to see such articles so ruthlessly treated. Soon the box was emptied of its valuable contents.

The cups, the salvers, the collecting plates—all, everything were beaten up into an indistinguishable mass.

The weight of the whole was something considerable, and therefore Jonathan proposed that the booty should be divided between them, that each should carry his share.

"But what are we to put it in?" said Noakes. "How are we to carry it? We want a sack, do we not?"

"We do; but it is out of the question to expect to find one here, I suppose?"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes—but I will find a substitute. Look here."

Grasping the crowbar once more, Jonathan struck one of the cupboard doors we have alluded to a heavy blow.

It was a blow the frail wood-work could not withstand.

The door swung open.

Inside several surplices were hanging.

"These are the things," said Wild. "Take one down for yourself, and tie up your share of the plate in it; make it as compact a bundle as you can, and leave a knot that you can grasp easily to carry it by, then we will rejoin our horses with all speed."

Mr. Noakes was highly delighted at the prospect of getting out of the church pretty soon.

The plate was tied up in the manner Jonathan Wild had directed.

Then each carrying a bundle passed out of the vestry into the church, and stole along the aisle until they came to the door by which they had entered.

It was still unfastened.

Hastily opening it, they ran out.

"Stoop down as you run," said Wild, in a suppressed voice, "and make haste!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing very serious, but I can tell by the look of the sky that the dawn is close at hand."

Mr. Noakes now made more exertion than he had done during the whole of the night.

He ran with might and main, and in a very brief space of time the iron gates were reached.

The bundles of plate were with some trouble thrown over on to the other side.

When, climbing up the iron-work as before, the two miscreants followed.

They reached the ground in safety, picked up the plate, and ran with redoubled speed towards the angle in the wall where they had left their horses.

Jonathan Wild was exceedingly anxious to be gone before daylight.

The horses were there in safety.

They had not been disturbed.

This was not wonderful, in such a quiet country place as that was.

Getting into the saddles, they placed the bundles of plate before them.

Then, spurring their horses violently, they set off across country at the top of their speed.

He almost fell from his horse from fright.

"Look—look," he said—"look behind you!"

Jonathan turned like lightning.

He uttered a curse.

Coming along at a furious pace, he could see a formidable-looking troop of police officers.

"Do you see them," asked Noakes—"do you see them?"

"Of course I do."

"We are lost—lost!"

"More likely found," said Jonathan, with a growl.

"But how can they again have got upon our track?"

"I am not sure that they have done so."

"Look back again."

"I have. They are at a great distance, and I question whether they can see us."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because we are down in this hollow and they are on the top of yonder hill. We must push on quickly—we shall elude them yet!"

Noakes groaned.

"Remember," added Wild, wishing to inspire his companion with courage—"remember that we are not more than forty miles from the sea-shore, and we have with us sufficient money, or money's worth."

"But what shall you do with the plate?"

"We must take it with us. Over in Holland, it will be the easiest matter in the world to get it sold for a good price. I know an agent there," continued Jonathan, gnashing his teeth, as though some disagreeable recollection had suddenly come across his mind.

The manner in which Jonathan spoke of the police officers in the rear, and the prospect of being so near to the coast, made a great difference in Mr. Noakes's feelings.

He did not believe that he was now in so much danger. In this, however, both himself and Wild were grievously in error.

As the reader will no doubt suspect, those police officers of whom they caught sight in the distance had been specially commissioned by the magistrate.

We may as well state here that, by the orders of this gentleman, the ruins of the mill had been thoroughly sifted and investigated.

The result of the search was the discovery of the body of the old miser.

How it was he came to be there, no one could tell.

But that he had met his death by violence—that, in fact, he had been murdered, there was ample evidence to be seen.

Then, making further inquiries, the magistrate soon became convinced that it was, indeed, no other than the two notorious villains, Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes, who had been lurking about in the vicinity, and who had committed the burglary at the inn.

He had communicated with the magistrate in the next town, and the result of the communication was the arming and the setting out of this very troop of police officers that Wild and Noakes beheld.

They held a special warrant to capture either of the miscreants dead or alive, the latter if possible, but if they resisted, and there seemed a probability that they would elude the hands of justice, they were to shoot them down without mercy.

The police officers had indeed kept very closely and accurately upon the two villains' track.

Whether Jonathan was right when he said he believed he was not seen, is more than we can say at present.

It made a considerable difference to his proceedings, however, now that he knew his pursuers were in the rear.

"I am confident we have not been observed at present," he said to Mr. Noakes, in an emphatic tone, "and if we are only careful we shall be safe enough."

"But what are we to do?"

"Why, we must avoid all open, rising ground. Keep close beneath the shadow of the trees and hedgerows, and if possible gain the cover of some wood or plantation. We must be on the look-out for something of the kind!"

Just then, as they continued their headlong flight, both noticed that they passed the entrance to a lane.

It was narrow, dark, and shady.

Tall trees grew on either side of it, planted closely to each other, and having long, outspreading boughs, which

CHAPTER CXXXV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES ELUDE THE POLICE OFFICERS, AND FIND REFUGE IN A FOREST.

Nor until they had gone some distance did Mr. Noakes turn round to look behind him.

At length he did so.

interlaced and formed a kind of leafy canopy overhead.

"Hold!" cried Wild. "Pull up—that's the place."

The officers were now out of sight; they were hidden from view by the intervening vegetation.

The entrance to the dark lane was soon reached again, and Wild and Noakes plunged down it without the least hesitation.

Like all other country lanes, this one was tortuous and winding.

But Wild found no fault with it on that account, because it afforded him a better chance of getting free from his pursuers.

As they proceeded, the face of the country grew more and more woody.

Clumps of trees abounded everywhere, and in the distance there seemed a huge mass of dark boughs, which looked as though there was a forest not many miles away.

If he could only gain this place, Jonathan Wild felt that he should be secure.

Whether he should be able to do so unseen by the police officers was the difficulty.

At present he had succeeded well.

On, on they went, until the termination of this narrow lane was reached.

At the extremity they found a moss-grown gate, over which they made their horses leap.

They were then upon rather uneven ground, upon which the trees—most of them of giant size—grew thickly.

"Hurrah!" said Jonathan, beneath his voice. "We are out of sight here."

"But dawn is close at hand."

"Very true."

"We must not continue our flight by daylight."

"Certainly not," cried Wild. "I want to gain the cover of the forest. We can remain there during the day, and at nightfall can set out."

"And the plate—what shall we do with it?"

"That's a point we must consider about. Forward—forward! Let us gain the wood."

"This looks like the borders of it," said Noakes, glancing around.

"It does, and doubtless it is."

"I breathe now quite freely."

"And so do I."

Not relaxing their speed any more than the rough nature of the ground compelled them to, Wild and Noakes continued their course, until soon afterwards they found themselves fairly beneath the trees of a large forest, the name of which was unknown to them.

Suddenly they came upon a huge heap of stones, and when he saw them they suggested an idea to Wild's prolific brain.

"We will conceal our bundles beneath these stones," he said—"now, while we have the opportunity."

"For what reason? Why not keep them with us?"

"Because the officers may yet put us to some little trouble. We might escape if we were free and unencumbered. At any rate, no harm can come of placing the treasure here, because it is a place we can so easily find again."

To this Noakes assented.

It was easy enough to remove a quantity of stones and make a cavity large enough to allow the two bundles to be placed in it.

Then the stones were filled in on the top, so that the heap presented its ordinary appearance.

"Mark the spot well," said Jonathan.

"I don't think I shall mistake now."

"Forward, then! The deeper we can penetrate into the recesses of this wood the better. Our horses can rest during the day, and so can we, provided we go far enough. Then, before daybreak to-morrow morning, we shall be on board."

This was indeed good news for Mr. Noakes—too good, he feared, to be true.

He could scarcely believe that, after all their trouble and danger, he was so near reaching the end.

He was determined, however, when once he landed in another country, he would part company with Jonathan Wild.

It was only continual torment to remain with him.

He resolved, come what would, that their paths should in the future lie in opposite directions.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Jonathan's brain was also busy.

What were the dark thoughts that were passing through his mind we cannot now relate.

He roused himself from a kind of reverie, and spoke sharply to his companion to mend his pace.

Deeper and deeper they plunged into the recesses of the forest, and as they approached the centre so did their progress become more and more difficult.

At length they were compelled to alight and lead their horses by the bridle.

In this manner they went on for a considerable distance, until at length, breaking through some dense underwood, they came upon a strange spectacle, which had the effect of riveting them to the spot.

CHAPTER DCXXXVI.

RETURNS TO BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD.

At this time, both Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes jointly and severally believed that they were gradually freeing themselves from the danger with which they had been surrounded.

Escape they both believed was within their reach.

But in this they were most grievously mistaken.

Those who were upon their track were not like ordinary police officers.

Revenge and hatred were spurring them on, and surely beneath these two passions both Wild and Noakes must fall.

Steggs was taking careful measures to bring about the result upon which he had set his mind.

At the present moment, however, it is not with Steggs that we have to do, but with Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

It will be remembered that we left them last journeying towards the roadside inn at which they had before obtained such valuable information.

They were arrested in their progress by hearing a sound which at once attracted all their sympathies.

They had firmly resolved not to engage in any other enterprise whatever, nor to be led astray into the following out of any adventure, but to fix their minds constantly and entirely upon the one object they had in view.

But this sound that they heard caused them to hesitate.

It was a scream.

A scream evidently that came from female lips.

A scream that nothing besides great danger and terror, or perhaps bodily injury, could have elicited.

"You hear that, Jack?" said Blueskin.

"I do."

"And where is your resolution?"

"We must give way for once. Follow me. We could not leave any female in distress and ride calmly on without attempting to render her assistance."

"You are right—such a thing is not in your nature nor in mine. Forward, then!"

Guided by the screams, which were now frequent, our two friends pushed forward as rapidly as they could.

A few paces farther on along the highway they came to a lane that intersected it.

It was down this turning, on the left-hand side, that the cries proceeded.

As they rode on, the moon, which had been peeping forth occasionally from between the clouds, now poured down a full flood of radiance.

By the aid of this light, our friends saw a sight which made the blood boil in their veins.

A rufianly-looking fellow had hold of a female by the arm.

She was struggling desperately, but, in comparison with his, her strength was nothing.

With great violence he forced her to her knees.

Shriek after shriek escaped her lips.

"Silence!" he said. "I swear again that if you utter another cry like that, I will be as good as my word—you shall die! I would have put a bullet through you before, only I knew your screams would be of no avail—they could reach the ears of no one!"

He presented a pistol to the woman's head as he spoke.

At sight of the weapon held so close to her, and at the sinister countenance of the man, she clasped her hands together and seemed about to faint with fright.

More than this, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard did not wait to see.

They bounded forward, and came upon the footpad at unawares.

Before he knew of their approach—before he could escape, Blueskin had seized him by the throat.

With a sudden movement he twisted the pistol from the fellow's grasp.

But Blueskin was under no necessity of taking these strict measures.

No sooner did he find himself caught, than the man, who was a rank coward, trembled and shook like a leaf, and but for Blueskin's grasp would have sunk quite down upon the ground.

"Mercy—mercy, good sir!" he said,—"mercy—mercy! I meant no harm!"

"Meant no harm?"

"No—no, on my word, no harm! It was only—only a jest!"

"Then it is a jest you shall pay dearly for! Remain still, or your life will be the forfeit!"

In the meanwhile, Jack had alighted from his steed and gone towards the lady.

Now that deliverance had come she had fallen down in the road quite insensible.

But she quickly recovered herself, and Jack asked:

"Are you hurt—are you hurt?"

"No—no! Pray help me to rise! I cannot thank you as I ought—I have no time."

"Have you been robbed of anything?" asked Jack.

"Nothing whatever, because I carry nothing that he could take."

"Then why did he attack you?"

"I suppose he thought I must have valuables of some kind with me. But I can't stay—indeed I can't! I am bound upon an errand of life and death, and every second is of the greatest importance, and that wretch has already hindered me several minutes!"

"We will settle with him," said Jack. "Don't fear that he will trouble you again. I trust you will meet with no further interruptions."

"No, no—I don't fear it. Farewell! Accept my deepest thanks for the service you have rendered me."

It was quite a young girl who spoke, and there was an expression of extreme pain and woe upon her countenance.

From some cause or other, she was evidently suffering deeply.

As soon as she had spoken these words, accompanying them by a glance which said more than her lips possibly could have said, she darted off along the road, and was in a moment out of sight.

"Now, rascal," said Blueskin, as he shook the footpad to and fro, "what reason have you to urge why I should not at once put an end to your miserable existence?"

"Mercy—mercy!"

"Cowardly wretch! have you no spark of manly feeling in you? Would you be so base—so contemptible—as to lie in wait, and then spring out upon a helpless, defenceless woman, and threaten her as you did?"

The man was silent.

"Come," said Jack, "don't stay talking with him, Blueskin. We will not let him go, however—he deserves something for his conduct. Alight a moment, and I will show you the way to treat him."

The man glared apprehensively about him, and renewed his supplications for mercy.

But Blueskin and Jack Sheppard disregarded them quite as much as he did the appeals of the lady.

Between them they could hold the rascal tight.

Jack had observed close by the side of the lane a small pool of stagnant water, the odour from which was most offensive.

The surface was thickly overgrown with slime and that disagreeable kind of vegetation which always flourishes in such places.

Blueskin understood in a second what Jack intended to do, and how the footpad was to be punished.

Between them they seized hold of him, neck and heels,

and swung him backwards and forwards until they had obtained the necessary impetus.

The footpad, too, knew what fate was in store for him, and struggled and kicked.

But all in vain.

"Now!" said Jack, suddenly.

As he spoke the word, he let go his hold.

So did Blueskin.

There was a loud splash, after which Blueskin and Jack were glad enough to retreat.

That pool must have been a spot where all the refuse of the country round was collected.

While the waters were quiescent the stench was insufferable.

But when stirred up by the man falling in, they were compelled to beat a hasty retreat.

The sound of splashing reached their ears for some moments.

The man was making the most frantic efforts to escape from his unsavoury bath.

But seemingly in vain.

"Let him be," said Blueskin, as he mounted his steed. "That fellow was never born to be drowned, and this, I hope, will be a caution to him."

"He will not forget it," said Jack, "depend upon that! But now, Blueskin, let us once more get upon the high-road. We are losing valuable time. Come, forward—quick!"

Blueskin scarcely required urging.

As soon as he was fairly in the saddle, he turned his horse's head round in the direction they ought to take.

Altogether, the interruption had not occupied very many minutes.

Still, however, they were at a considerable distance from the inn they wished to reach.

This was the point at which their inquiries had to commence, and they would have to patiently track Jonathan step by step from there, until eventually they came up with him.

They had every incentive to make good speed.

But, in spite of their impatience, they recollected their steeds.

They knew how much depended upon them, and how serious the consequences would be if either happened to be knocked up or otherwise disabled.

At length, about two hours afterwards, Blueskin raised his arm, and said:

"There, Jack—there is the public-house!"

CHAPTER DCXXXVII.

JOE THE OSTLER FURNISHES BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD WITH HIGHLY IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

"Will you stop there again?" asked Jack.

"I think we had better."

"As you will. I am indifferent, and yet some little refreshment would be welcome enough."

"Yes, and to our horses as well."

"We cannot hear intelligence of this kind too often, and we may extract something that escaped us on the former occasion."

This settled the point, and they halted near the gates at the side of the inn.

The ostler, with his face still presenting a most remarkable appearance in consequence of the quantity of sticking-plaster that crossed and recrossed it in every direction, came lounging forward.

"Going to bait, gentlemen?" he said.

"No—you can just give the horses a mouthful of hay, and let them have a drop of water, that's all."

"Going to ride far to-night, gentlemen?" said the ostler, looking up to the sky.

"Yes—most probably."

"Then, if your journey is not very urgent, I should recommend you to put it off."

"Why?"

"It will be an uncommon rough night—that it will."

"How can you tell?"

"By the look of the sky, and by the way the wind whistles round the corner of the stable. I always know when there is a storm brewing. Take my word, in less than half an hour the rain will come down in a perfect flood."

Blueskin looked inquiringly at Jack.

But the latter only said:

"Our business is urgent, and you would say so if you knew what it is."

"Well, what might it be, sir?"

"We are going after Jonathan Wild."

The ostler uttered a yell.

"Jonathan Wild?" he uttered, in a tone of the greatest passion.

"Yes—we are determined to capture him. We know he was here."

"Yes, d—n him," interrupted the ostler, "and so do I. Look at my face."

"We heard all about that when we were here last," said Jack. "You have a score to settle with him?"

"I have; but I shall be content to see him swinging some morning from the gallows at Tyburn—that'll content me. I shall live to see it too, I know I shall!"

"Very likely," continued Jack; "that is if our exertions can go for anything. Will you tell us all you can about him?"

"But I don't know much."

"Very likely, yet the little you are acquainted with may be of more service to us than you may imagine."

"Well, then, gentlemen what is it you want to know?"

"Why, will you tell us, if possible, which way he went when he left the inn?"

"Oh, yes, I can do that."

"And if you can give us any clue to his proceedings afterwards we shall be infinitely obliged."

"I can do that too," said the ostler, with gleaming eyes.

"Very well, speak out—speak freely."

With a great deal of circumstantial detail, the ostler then informed Jack how in the first place he had recognised Jonathan Wild—how that worthy had become aware of the fact, and how he flung the mug into the unfortunate man's face.

He related, too, how he had sprung, bare-backed, upon one of the horses with nothing but the halter to guide him, and how he had pursued Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes for some distance, keeping in advance of the officers.

These facts are well known to the reader.

But it is necessary to mention just what information Blueskin and Jack received.

Joe the ostler related how he had been wounded, and how his horse had entangled his feet in the rope of the halter and thrown him to the ground.

"That's as far as I can speak myself," he added. "I pursued them straight along the road that leads past this inn, I suppose for a matter of two miles or more."

"And after that you know nothing?"

"Nothing, positively, that I saw myself."

"But you do know something?"

"Oh yes!"

"What is it? Speak out—all this is most important to us!"

"Well, then, the officers, after my downfall, continued their pursuit. I should tell you that I fired and wounded one of the wretches."

"Which was it?—Jonathan Wild?"

"No—I wish it was."

"Mr. Noakes, then?"

"Yes, and by the track of blood he left behind him the officers were able to track the villains very well. I found out these particulars by degrees, you understand."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, then, after a good deal of trouble, they traced Jonathan and Mr. Noakes to a wood, and then to a hut in that wood, where some coiners had taken up their quarters, and from there to an old barn, where they lay for some time concealed."

"And did they make their escape from the barn?"

"They were altogether too clever for the officers. They seem to me to have had pretty much their own way."

"But this," said Blueskin, "is much more than I could have hoped to learn to-night. Can you describe the position of this barn?"

"Oh, yes, quite well; but I can direct you beyond that."

"Can you, indeed?"

"Yes. While along with the coiners, Jonathan and Mr. Noakes escaped, but they left their horses behind them and they fell into the hands of the police; so when they got out of the barn, they ran on foot a considerable distance until they came to a public-house. Dear me, what was the sign of that public-house?"

"Can't you recollect it?"

"Not at this moment—but I shall directly. I know, however, that it was kept by a man named Timothy Goodridge?"

"Did the officers follow them to this place?"

"Yes, and obtained certain intelligence of them. The landlord had been kind enough to show them some hospitality, believing them to be men in distress, so they took advantage of it to steal two of his best horses out of the stable."

"This is excellent," said Jack. "Why, we shall be close up to him in a little while?"

"But I can tell you more," said the ostler, who was delighted at the opportunity of imparting all the information he possessed.

"What do you know? What became of them after they left this public-house?"

"Well, I only know they rode on for some distance until they met with a traveller, whom they robbed and shot. There the trace ends, however, and I can tell you no more."

"It is quite sufficient," said Blueskin—"a thousand times more than we had dared to anticipate."

"I wish I knew where he was now," said Joe, gnashing his teeth savagely, "I would pretty soon put you on the scent."

"You have done quite enough, and our thanks are your due. Here, take this as a reward for all you have told us."

"No, no, gentlemen—I don't want money for a case like this. I didn't tell for money, but in order that that villain might be nabbed. I have had serious thoughts of setting out after him myself."

"You had better leave it to us," said Blueskin. "We have a long score to settle with him, but the day is close at hand."

"But I should not recommend you to begin your journey to-night, for all that."

"What, in consequence of the weather?"

"Yes—it will be a rough night, and no mistake. There—did you feel that? I know what that means."

The ostler alluded to a sudden gust of wind, upon which was borne a number of rain drops that sprinkled everything.

Then the moisture was gone.

"That's the forerunner of the storm," he said. "It will be a regular drencher. It is no interest of mine, but take my advice—go into the house and stay there till the storm is over."

"Well, we'll think of it. Lead our horses into the stable, and attend to them well."

"You may rely upon that."

"We shall depend upon you," said Blueskin, "for in this matter our horses will be of the utmost importance to us."

"I know that," said the ostler.

And as he spoke, he led the two horses away.

Blueskin and Jack watched him until he disappeared. They saw him once or twice look up to the sky and shake his head.

The heavens did indeed present a threatening aspect.

Huge, dense, leaden-coloured clouds were covering up the sky in every direction, and there was that peculiar feel in the air which is always noticed before a storm.

"I think the ostler is right," said Jack, as they reached the threshold of the inn. "However, we'll get something to drink. It will be a storm of no ordinary kind that will keep me back to-night."

"I may say the same," said Blueskin, "and yet, considering the amount of information we have so unexpectedly gained, we can well afford to stay for a few hours if we find it necessary."

"Just so, and when we reach this other inn, the sign of which, by the way, we must make ourselves acquainted with, I hope we shall obtain as much intelligence respecting Jonathan's movements as we have obtained here."



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES TAKE VIOLENT POSSESSION OF A BOAT.]

CHAPTER DCXXXVIII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD HOPE TO HEAR STILL FURTHER INTELLIGENCE RESPECTING JONATHAN WILD.

"I HOPE so," replied Jack, "and yet I scarcely expect it. But come on—we will sit down and make ourselves comfortable for a few minutes, at any rate."

"Will you take a private room if there is one to be had, or will you join those who are in that room yonder? Look, it seems to be almost full."

Blueskin and Jack were in the passage of the inn, and, as the former spoke, he pointed to an open door.

Beyond this, a partial view of a room could be obtained, in which a number of men were sitting round a huge, roaring fire.

"I hardly know how to answer that question," said No. 138.—BLUESKIN.

Jack. "If we consult our own safety only, we must take a private room!"

"It is necessary that we should do that."

"Look to our own safety?"

"Yes."

"I know it; but, at the same time, I think, if the risk is not too great, that it will be better for us to enter the room yonder."

"So do I," replied Blueskin; "for, in the casual conversation, something may be dropped respecting our hated foe which will be important to us."

"It is more than likely," said Jack, "considering that he paid a visit to this very place."

"Don't let us stand here deliberating any longer, then."

"Have you made up your mind to run the risk?"

"I have."

"Then come."

So saying, Blueskin and Jack entered the tap-room, or, rather, front kitchen of the inn, taking care to do so quietly and unobtrusively, so as not to bring any more notice down upon them than they could possibly help.

They chose a retired corner and sat down.

The eyes of all present were turned upon them when they entered; but the only light in the kitchen came from the huge fire.

This light, then, was flickering and inconstant, and a very difficult one to recognise people by, in consequence of the ever-fitting shadows which it cast.

Blueskin called for refreshments, which were quickly laid before them.

For some time after their arrival, a profound silence reigned.

The conversation that had been going on among the regular frequenters of the place suddenly ceased.

Not one of them now seemed able to articulate a word.

By degrees the darkness much increased.

Then, suddenly, the room was lighted up by a bright and vivid flash of lightning.

"We're going to have a rough night of it," said one in the company. "I thought, before now, that we should have it. Hark!"

The voice of the speaker was drowned in a loud and deafening peal of thunder, which seemed to shake the old inn to its very foundations.

Then followed the rain.

It came down in a perfect torrent, striking with full force against the window-panes.

The rushing noise it made by its descent could be distinctly heard by all.

"The ostler was quite right," whispered Jack, "when he prophesied what sort of a night we should have."

"He was quite right. We cannot do better now than take his advice—such a storm as this is sufficient to quell even my impatience."

"Yes, and mine; and I am inclined to think that the time we shall spend here will be by no means thrown away, and that we shall learn, perhaps, some important information."

"Well, we shall see. But how the rain does come down!"

"It is terrific!"

In good truth, a long time had elapsed since there had been a storm so fierce as that was.

The thunder crashed, and the lightning blazed almost incessantly.

By degrees, however, its violence abated.

That is to say, longer pauses took place between the peals of thunder, though the rain still poured down with undiminished vigour.

The remark that had been made about the roughness of the night served to unlock the tongues of all the rest, and now the conversation went on rapidly and as well as the peals of thunder would permit.

Every now and then the voices would be drowned by the crashing din.

At present, however, nothing had been said sufficiently interesting to deserve recording.

Blueskin and Jack both hoped that the conversation would quickly work round to the subject of Jonathan Wild.

But for the fear of attracting too much attention to themselves, they would have started the topic.

Prudence, however, bade them be silent and wait their time.

At present, it was quite out of the question for them to leave the inn, so they leaned back in their seats, pretending not to take any notice of anything that was going forward.

Suddenly one man, addressing another who sat near to him, said:

"What was that you were going to say about Jonathan Wild a little while ago? You never finished."

"I don't know that I had anything to say about him particularly," was the reply. "I was only going to ask whether they had nabbed him yet."

"I have not heard of it—have you?"

"No."

"Nor any of you?"

"No."

"Then I suppose the villain is at large. It's a sin and a shame that he should be. Such a man is neither fit to live

nor die; yet, for the sake of others, he is better out of this world than in it!"

There was a tinge of bitterness in the man's voice as he thus spoke, and Blueskin and Jack both immediately jumped to the conclusion that he had more than a passing interest in Jonathan Wild's fate, and that, for some reason or other, he had especial cause to hate him.

"He is a great rascal!" exclaimed another, "if all that we have heard of him is true; but, then, that is questionable, so many stories are set abroad by one and another."

"Very true," added another; "and we must remember the old proverb."

"What old proverb?"

"That the devil is not so black as he is painted."

"And you think Jonathan Wild may not be so bad after all?"

"I do."

"What grounds have you for thinking so?"

"None in particular. I might say no grounds at all; only I never believe quite all I hear."

"But Jonathan Wild, as is well known, has excelled in every kind of atrocity. There is no crime—no barbarity which he has not committed. He is ruthless, vindictive, and a fiend rather than a man!"

"You are no friend of his, Mr. Thorpe."

"I am not," was the reply; "and I trust that not in all the world could such a man find a friend."

"Well, there's one comfort," cried another, "he will be scragged one of these days, and there will be an end of him—we shall be troubled no longer."

"He ought to have been executed long ago," said Mr. Thorpe; "it puzzles me to understand why such demons are allowed to live and wreak the havoc that they do."

"I suppose there's a purpose in it," was the reply.

"Perhaps so; but I find it hard to think so; I cannot believe that things are ordered for the best."

Mr. Thorpe's listener looked at him in surprise.

Such words as he had just uttered had never before reached their ears.

Not one of them had ever ventured to dispute the divine fitness of things as he did then.

But he was well known to all of them as a well-to-do, respectable man, generally gloomy and reserved, though at times he spoke somewhat freely, as he seemed inclined then.

The general impression was that he had a heavy secret weighing upon his mind—that something had occurred to him in his early youth that had blighted all his hopes and destroyed his happiness.

He was ever anxious upon the subject of Jonathan Wild's capture.

His visits to the public-house where he now sat were few and far between.

The approaching storm had caused him to take shelter there on that occasion.

Although so far as his social position and education went he was far superior to any there, yet, being naturally affable and pleasant, he sat down, treating all with condescension and consideration.

He was a great favourite with all who knew him, and the guests in the public-house paid him every imaginable respect.

CHAPTER DCXXXIX.

SOME PARTICULARS CONNECTED WITH JONATHAN WILD ARE BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

MR. THORPE had noticed the surprise that his words had caused, so he remarked:

"You seem astonished, my friend, to hear me make such an assertion; but, strange as it may be, it is nevertheless perfectly true. I have been betrayed into saying more than I intended, but yet I repeat I find myself unable to reconcile myself to what are called the decrees of providence, and believe that things are ordered for the best."

"But why not, sir—why not?" asked several.

"Now that I have spoken so far," replied Mr. Thorpe, "you have a perfect right to ask that question—it is no more than natural."

"Well, sir, will you tell us why not?"

"It would take a long time."

"But we will listen, sir; and, as for this storm, although

the thunder does seem to be going off a bit, yet the rain comes down as fast as ever, so if you would not mind."

A shade came over Mr. Thorpe's face.

"It will reap up the past," he said, "and yet I am always thinking about it—it is never absent from my mind."

There was a silence after this speech, for it was one very difficult to reply to.

Mr. Thorpe sat with his arms folded, and his eyes fixed upon the fire.

For several minutes he remained thus.

Then he broke the silence that prevailed by saying:

"My friends, I will tell you something about Jonathan Wild."

Blueskin and Jack started.

"Jonathan Wild?" exclaimed several.

"Yes. I will tell you one incident in his career—one episode out of many—one dark, revolting crime that he committed—a crime for which, in my opinion, he deserves to die a thousand deaths, each one more painful than the first."

He ground his teeth as he spoke.

"Then, did you ever have any dealings with him?" asked some one.

"Yes, but many years ago—so many that, although a villain of the blackest die, he was not then so guilty—so diabolical as he is now."

All bent forward eagerly, anxious to catch every word that Mr. Thorpe should utter.

"When I have told you this little anecdote," he said, at length, "I fancy that there will not be one among you who will fancy that Jonathan Wild is not so bad as he is represented—on the contrary, unless I am greatly mistaken, your hearts will all burn with the desire that he may meet with that punishment which the law of this land awards to those who have been guilty of only one crime out of thousands he has committed."

"We will be all attention, Mr. Thorpe," said a voice. "You have made us very curious to hear what you will say."

"Well, then, I must tell you that many years ago there lived in a village not many miles from London, a fair young girl, who was universally admired, not only for her beauty, which was matchless, but for all those graces which make women dear and lovely."

"She won the respect of all who knew her by her unimpeachable conduct, and for miles round there was not one young man who would not have given all that he possessed for one smile from her lips."

Mr. Thorpe spoke with some emotion, as though this mention of the young girl called up memories of the past that awakened in his breast emotions which had long been dormant.

"This is a point upon which I could dwell at some length, but I shall not. I will only tell you that Jonathan Wild, then carrying on the business of a constable or thief-taker, happened one day to pass the cottage in which she dwelt. Ellen—for that was her name—was in the little bit of carefully-cultivated garden in front of the cottage, and which was separated from the road by some low, white palisades."

"She was engaged in some gardening operations when Jonathan, riding by, perceived her. His heart—if such a one as he is can possess one—was touched immediately by her beauty, and he resolved that he would make her his wife. I say wife, though I have no actual means of knowing that his intentions were good—so far as that I would not speak without proof."

"At that time, Jonathan Wild's power was immense. All knew it, and all dreaded him. Jonathan himself was aware of this, and it galled him deeply, so that he made it an excuse for perpetrating so many cruelties as he did."

"Having conceived this determination, he said nothing to the girl, nor did he act in a way that would lead her to suspect that any such thoughts had found a place in his mind."

"But he went direct to the girl's parents, and made his overtures to them. They were good, simple people, and had heard much of the great power that Jonathan Wild possessed. It is probable that they exaggerated it, and, therefore, they did not as they should have done—at once have rejected his proposal, and abided by the consequences; they adopted a medium course, for they told him that it was not their intention to control their

daughter's inclinations in any way. So far as they were concerned, she was at liberty to wed just whoever she thought proper."

"You have a fair, open field before you, Mr. Wild," said Ellen's father. "Make your suit, and, if you can induce my daughter to look favourably upon you, why, well and good. If she consents, mine shall not be wanting. I can say no fairer than that."

"This was not what the thief-taker wanted, but he made it appear as though he was quite delighted with the answer he had received."

"He tried as well as he could to make himself amiable. Whether he succeeded or failed is more than I can tell just at present."

"But not to linger too long, I will just add that he lost no time in making his advances to Ellen."

"As might be expected, the young and lovely girl looked upon Jonathan Wild with complete disdain."

"She did not attempt to conceal her sentiments, but let her suitor know exactly what she thought of him. It was nothing favourable, you may depend; and, with rage in his heart, Jonathan departed."

"For the time he was baffled, but not conquered."

"Ere long he returned to the charge again."

"Have you thought well upon my proposal?" he asked—

"Have you considered it?"

"No," was the reply; "I have never deemed it worthy a moment's thought," replied Ellen. "You are already acquainted with my sentiments. I will never be your wife!"

"We shall see," said Jonathan, frowning darkly—"we shall see!"

"See what?"

"Look here, girl," added the thief-taker. "You may know my name—you may have heard of me—you may have been told—you may have guessed of the power I possess; but, rest assured, you can form no idea of its extent!"

"Nor do I wish to do so!" was the reply. "I do not desire to learn anything respecting you! Begone!—leave me!"

"I will not! I once again ask you whether you will say yes to my proposition?"

"No—no!" she answered—"no—ten thousand times no!"

"Well, then," answered Jonathan Wild, "if you persist in this refusal, you yourself shall be covered with disgrace and shame! Through you your parents shall live a miserable life, with a load of care weighing upon them—pressing them down—yes, pressing them into the grave! They will die with deep sorrow in their hearts, and you will be the cause!"

"Such ambiguous, threatening words as these, as you may easily expect, produced upon the mind of a girl like Ellen a deep and terrible impression."

"She loved her parents dearly, and above all earthly things desired they should be happy."

"Dark tales had from time to time reached her ears of what Jonathan Wild had done."

"She was alarmed and terrified, and the villainous thief-taker was not slow to perceive the great effect his words had already caused."

CHAPTER DCXL.

JONATHAN WILD GLUTS HIS REVENGE.

"BEWARE!" he said. "I tell you to beware, and not to tempt me too far! I say, beware of the consequences of your refusal!"

"Ellen tried to summon up some degree of resolution, and with more spirit than Jonathan expected, she replied:

"Begone! I have not another word to say to you! I will not speak!"

"This enraged the thief-taker exceedingly, so, clenching his fists, he said:

"But I say you shall—you shall! You will repent, and when it is too late! Remember, too, that the consequences will fall heavily, not only on the heads of your parents, but on your own! You shall perish—yes, surely perish by a painful, lingering death, and by a death which must of all others be most hateful to one of your sex!"

"But again Ellen refused him, and muttering indistinct threats of vengeance, he departed.

"I must now tell you that Ellen used frequently to go up to the manor-house where the squire resided. She was employed by the squire's wife to do a great deal of needlework, and when she had performed it, she used to take it home.

"She was a great favourite with everyone at the manor-house, the squire himself included. She was permitted to go into the lady's own room.

"One morning, when, according to custom, she went, she found the squire's wife in a great state of pleasurable excitement. She was so overjoyed that she could not contain herself, and so turning to Ellen, she said:

"See—see, my girl, what a handsome present I have received this morning—my husband gave it me! It is our wedding-day. Look—look!—is it not beautiful?"

"While speaking, she held out a small box. Pressing a spring, the lid flew open and disclosed a beautiful gold watch, thickly encrusted with precious stones. It was of the very best manufacture, and worth a fabulous amount. It was made to be as expensive as possible. Attached to it was a slender gold chain of exquisite workmanship.

"Upon this object Ellen gazed with clasped hands and dilated eyes. Never before had she seen anything so beautiful, and she was loud in her praises and exclamations of delight.

"The good lady was well enough pleased to find that Ellen so appreciated her gift.

"At length, and with reluctance, the lid was shut down and the box put aside; Ellen then delivered the package she had brought, and in reply, the squire's wife said:

"Wait a moment, my good girl—wait a moment! Sit down, and I will go and fetch you a dress for my little girl, which I want you to embroider in the very best way you are able. Sit down while I fetch it—I will soon return."

"She passed out of the room as she spoke, leaving Ellen seated at no great distance from the table on which the little velvet box containing the watch had been placed.

"A few minutes elapsed, and then a servant appeared at the door.

"If you please," she said, addressing Ellen, "my mistress wishes to see you downstairs."

"She rose in a moment and followed the servant. The packet of work was duly handed over to her, and after a few commonplace words, Ellen set out on her journey home.

"Not to linger, after her departure a friend arrived, to whom the squire's wife was anxious to display the gift she had that morning received.

"She went to the table upon which she had placed it, but to her horror and consternation it was gone.

"In vain she searched hurriedly all over the apartment, wondering where she could have placed it.

"A dreadful fear took possession of her mind. Her excitement was something dreadful to witness. By degrees, however, she calmed herself, and then renewed the search.

"She did not cease until she had examined the room carefully in every part.

"When she had done so, she was forced to come to the conclusion that the watch was gone.

"Who has been in the room?" asked her friend, sympathising deeply with her distress. "In my opinion, it has been taken. Who has been in the room?"

"Ellen!" was the reply.

"And who is she?"

"A poor girl living in the village, to whom I give employment in needlework. I left her here for a few moments about half an hour ago."

"And did she know you had the watch?"

"Yes, I showed it to her."

"And did she see you put it down again?"

"Yes. I remember now distinctly, I placed it just here upon the table."

"Then the matter is quite clear—she must have taken it."

"I will not believe it!" said the squire's wife. "I have known the girl from childhood, and cannot credit that she would be guilty of such an act!"

"She may have succumbed in a moment of temptation."

"The lady could not tell, but hastened downstairs to her husband.

"His rage was very great when he learned that his handsome gift had been mislaid or stolen.

"For some moments he was frantic.

"Then he said:

"Mind no one leaves this house—take care of that! The watch has evidently been stolen, and I will discover by whom!"

"How?" inquired his terrified wife. "What steps shall you take?"

"I will ride off to London immediately!" he said. "I will go to the famous Jonathan Wild—I will warrant he will find out who is the thief!"

"At that time," said Mr. Thorpe, interrupting himself in his narrative, "you must remember that although some ugly whispers had been circulated concerning Jonathan Wild, yet he was looked upon as a very effective police officer indeed, and one who was quite invaluable in the recovery of stolen property.

"It was in this character that the worthy squire had heard of the villain.

"A friend had told him how, in a seemingly miraculous manner, Jonathan Wild had restored to him a quantity of valuables of which he had been robbed.

"It was, therefore, no more than natural that he should set out for the residence of the thief-taker.

"The distance to London was little more than ten miles, and as the squire was mounted on an excellent horse it did not take him long to reach Wild's residence.

"He knocked at the door of his house and was admitted.

"He was requested to state his business, but would only say that he desired to see Jonathan Wild.

"He is not at home at present," said the man who had charge of the front door, "nor can I tell you when he may return. He generally makes his appearance when least expected."

"This was vexatious to the squire, for he was all impatience.

"While he was in conversation with the man in the passage, however, there came a sharp rattling sound at the front door, and then it opened.

"Jonathan Wild entered, and the squire instinctively shrank back from so repulsive-looking a scoundrel.

"Well, he stated the whole of the circumstances to Jonathan Wild, that worthy taking down nearly every word upon a sheet of paper.

"Then he said:

"I will not tell you in what directions my suspicions lie, because I may be in error. In as short a time as I possibly can I will wait upon you at your residence, and let you know the result."

"And do you think you shall succeed, Mr. Wild? It is not so much the punishment of the offender that I desire as the recovery of the watch, which cost me a very large sum indeed."

"You must leave the matter entirely in my hands," rejoined Wild. "I will do my best for you, depend upon it. In matters like this it is very rarely indeed that I fail, and I feel tolerably sure of the result in this instance."

CHAPTER DCXLI.

JONATHAN WILD PLAYS HIS VILLANOUS PART TO ADMIRATION.

"In the course of a day or two, Jonathan Wild paid a visit to the squire's house.

"He pretended to make a careful examination of it, and asked numberless questions of the squire's wife, and indeed of all the inhabitants of the place.

"Then, going to the squire, he said:

"All that I have yet learned only serves to convince me that my original suspicion was correct. In these matters I am seldom wrong—I seem to arrive at the right conclusion by a kind of instinct."

"Then you believe it has been stolen?"

"Yes, unquestionably."

"And the culprit—who may that be?"

"The girl Ellen."

"Impossible—I will not believe it! I would as soon believe my own wife was guilty!"

"It is no rash statement I have made," added Wild—"I can assure you I have good grounds for speaking! She is the guilty person!"

"How do you know it?"

"Why, it seems to me perfectly clear that your wife's incautious act of showing it to her raised in her heart a feeling of cupidity. She was left alone in the room with this valuable ornament—the temptation was before her, and she could not resist it. She secreted the little velvet box about her person and carried it away."

"You speak positively, Mr. Wild."

"I do. I feel almost as certain as I should do if I had seen her."

"And what has she done with the watch?"

"That's a question I am at present unable to answer, but doubtless I shall be able to give you a reply ere long."

"Has it been disposed of?"

"No—I can answer that question positively. My own belief is, that she was overcome with terror and remorse after committing the theft, and in order to conceal the crime, has hidden the watch somewhere, thinking, perhaps, that the inquiry will die out in time, and then she will be able to possess herself of it."

"And supposing she has hidden the watch in the way you say, do you believe you shall be able to find out where?"

"I think so—at any rate, I will try."

"With these words Jonathan Wild took his leave, and did not make his appearance for several days."

"But during that time he was noticed lurking about the village."

"There was perhaps nothing extraordinary in this, considering the task he had undertaken to perform, however."

"He at length went to the squire, and said:

"I feel certain that the watch is concealed somewhere in or about the cottage. You have sufficient grounds to demand a search—will you, then, accompany one of my men to the place, and watch the result?"

"The squire consented, and the whole party made their way to the cottage in which Ellen dwelt."

"She viewed their approach with astonishment, and when she saw that Jonathan Wild was among them, she started violently."

"The squire perceived it, and drew from it his own conclusions."

"Ellen had been made aware of the loss of the watch, but she had not been told that the principal suspicion was directed towards herself."

"But when the squire saw her lovely countenance, and reflected what would be the consequences to her if this case were brought against her, his heart was touched with pity."

"Making a sign with his hand to Jonathan Wild and his men, he advanced, saying:

"I have come upon a very sad errand here, Ellen—a very sad one indeed. You must be aware that that beautiful watch has been stolen from my house. Inquiry has been made, and I grieve to say it for your own and your parents' sake, the suspicion rests on you."

"Ellen turned very pale, and seemed about to faint."

"The blow was as unexpected as it was terrible."

"I am very sorry for you, Ellen," continued the squire, "and, if I can, will shield you from the consequences of the act you have committed. Tell me where the watch is—surrender it to me, and I will give you my word that you shall be troubled no more in this affair. I will find the means to close Jonathan Wild's lips, and you will escape the consequences of your guilty act."

"Indeed—indeed, sir," sobbed Ellen, "do you really think that I could be so base—so guilty?"

"The squire frowned."

"The words displeased him."

"After such a conciliating speech, he imagined Ellen would immediately admit her crime."

"I am not guilty!" she cried, vehemently. "I did not take the watch! I know nothing about it! Your suspicions are ill-directed!"

"Then you refuse to do as I desire—to partake of the mercy which I was willing to show?"

"Yes, sir, I am, for I am innocent—quite innocent!"

"Then the only course left is to search this cottage thoroughly. I have every reason to believe that the watch will be discovered. Recollect, Ellen, I give you one more opportunity. Tell me where the watch is, or give it to me, and you shall meet with no further trouble."

"I can't, sir—I can't! I know nothing about it! The last time I saw it, it was upon the dressing-table near the window."

"The squire turned round angrily at this refusal."

"His voice was loud—angry—as he said to Wild:

"Search this place—search it thoroughly, and if you find the watch, as I hope you will, take the girl into custody. She deserves it for her obstinacy."

"She does indeed!" returned Wild, with a bow. "She must have great confidence in the excellence of the hiding-place she has found. That's the reason why she denies her manifest guilt."

"Indignant words rose up to Ellen's lips, but she repressed them."

"The consternation of her parents was very great."

"Not for a single moment did they believe their beloved daughter guilty."

"But the mere fact of her having been suspected, and the house searched, was almost more than they could bear."

"All through their lives they had preserved an excellent character for justness and integrity."

"Therefore they felt this suspicion all the more keenly."

"Jonathan Wild was occupied a long time in searching about the premises."

"But he met with no result."

"The squire stood by, watching all anxiously and eagerly."

"At last he began to think that Jonathan Wild was mistaken, and that Ellen was innocent."

"I have searched the house thoroughly, said the thief-taker, coming towards him."

"And have you found nothing?"

"Nothing at present."

"Jonathan laid a peculiar emphasis on the last two words."

"Where shall you search now?"

"Only the garden is left. I should have begun with it at the first, since it offers such a ready means of concealment; but I judged it better to examine the house first. I am satisfied the watch is not there. Now I will try the garden."

"Jonathan and his men poked about among the garden-beds for the space of a couple of hours at least."

"Nothing was found, however, and again the squire felt inclined to think that his suspicions were unfounded."

"He had almost arrived at this conclusion, indeed, when he was startled by a shout, and, looking up, saw that an unusual commotion was going on with Wild's men in one portion of the garden."

"Guessing what had happened, he hastened in that direction."

"Here, sir—come, look—tell me whether I am right?" said Wild. "Look at this!"

"He pointed down to the ground, and then the squire saw in a little hole, half buried by the earth, the velvet case that formed a covering of the watch."

"I have not touched it yet," said Wild—"Dicks found it. Now, however, as you have seen it here, I will pick it up."

"He suited the action to the word."

"Is that the case?" he asked.

"I believe it is," answered the squire. "Open it—let me look inside."

"Jonathan touched a spring."

"The lid flew open."

"Lying there, in the little padded recess that had been provided for it, was the watch, with the slender gold chain encircling it."

"Yes," cried the squire, "that's it—I'll swear to it from a thousand. She is guilty—guilty—there can be no doubt about it! But I am very sorry for the poor girl—very sorry indeed!"

CHAPTER DCXLII.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS THAT THINGS DO NOT GO ON QUITE AS HE EXPECTED.

"No one was more startled and astonished upon learning that the watch had been found in the garden than was poor Ellen herself.

"She sank down at once upon the ground in a swoon.

"It was not without great difficulty that she was restored to consciousness.

"The squire was very sorry for her; and, had it been in his power, I do believe that he would have forgiven her for the crime of which he believed her guilty.

"He even called Jonathan Wild aside and said something to that effect.

"But the thief-taker shook his head, and replied:

"No, sir—it is more than my life is worth to compromise a felony. You know as well as I do what is the penalty attached to the act; and although I feel strongly tempted to forget my duty on this occasion, yet I must remember myself. Justice to the world at large demands that the crime of theft should be severely punished."

"Then what shall you do?"

"I must take her into custody, and lodge her in the nearest prison until the morning; then she will be brought before a magistrate, and, of course, committed to Newgate to take her trial."

"It's a dreadful thing," said the squire—"and could I but have foreseen it, I would have put up with the loss of the watch and said nothing about it."

"Then, excuse me for saying so, you would have done very wrong."

"I know it—I know it. But to think that one so young and beautiful as she is should have such a dreadful fate hanging over her!"

"You must not look upon it in that point of view," said Wild.

"Despite, then, her tears, and entreaties, and agonizing supplications—and despite, too, all that was said by her aged parents, Ellen was ruthlessly torn away from her home, and hurried off to prison by Jonathan Wild's associates.

"I am not guilty!" she screamed, as they forced her through the gate—"I am innocent! It is you—you, Jonathan Wild, who have brought all this trouble upon me—it is you who have caused me to appear guilty of this charge in order to be revenged upon me because I would not listen to your addresses!"

"The squire looked to see what effect these words would have upon the thief-taker.

"That individual was quite unmoved.

"He turned to the squire and said, in a calm voice:

"I am often accused in this fashion by persons in her difficulty. They are so angry and exasperated at being found out in their wickedness, that they know not hardly what they say, but are only governed by a desire to do all the mischief that lies in their power."

"It may be so," said the squire, thoughtfully. "You know much more about these matters than I do."

"Yes—I have had more experience."

"And on the following morning Ellen was brought up before the magistrate.

"The case was stated clearly enough against her, and she pleaded not guilty to the charge.

"But the evidence was so clear and so circumstantial that the magistrate would pay no attention to her plea.

"The only course that lay open to him was to commit her to take her trial at the next Old Bailey sessions, and accordingly he did so.

"It was dreadful to think a young and innocent girl like Ellen should be made the inmate of a Newgate cell, for," added Mr. Thorpe, impressively, "she was innocent, I am sure of it—as innocent of the crime as any of you are that are present now.

"She was right in the accusation she had made.

"Jonathan Wild had done it all to be revenged.

"I learned a great deal about it, but not till after—not till after!"

Mr. Thorpe shuddered.

"I have not much more to tell," he said; "but yet the most important part of my story remains to be told.

"Ellen at first was inconsolably distraught at finding herself in such a terrible position.

"A day or two elapsed, and then Jonathan Wild paid a visit to her cell.

"Ellen," he said, "do you know that you are now in the clutch of the law, and that one thing alone can save you?"

"She disdained to answer.

"The case," he said, "is one of the clearest that could possibly be brought into a court of justice. The evidence is complete in every particular—it is as good as if some one actually saw you in the very act of purloining the watch."

"Ellen uttered a moan of anguish.

"You cannot, of course, be ignorant," continued Wild, "of the penalty which the law awards for the crime with which you are charged. It is death—death by the hands of the hangman at Tyburn in the presence of a horrible, jeering crowd."

"Yes," said Ellen, springing to her feet, "I remember your threats now—remember them too late! You told me to beware how I refused your suit, and said that you would cause my parents to linger out a life of agony and shame, and that I should die the most repulsive death that could be imagined. So far you have accomplished your purpose."

"Jonathan smiled mockingly.

"I will be generous," he said. "I can't help being fond of you, and if you will only smile upon me I will free you from your present terrible position."

"Never—never!"

"Reflect. I am the only man in the world who can and will stretch forth a helping hand to save you. I can save you, I assure you of it. I can so arrange matters that when you are brought up for trial a verdict of not guilty will be returned against you."

"Then do so—do so," said Ellen—"in pity do so, for you know that I am innocent!"

"To this last assertion, Jonathan paid no attention.

"I will do it," he said—"I will undertake to do it; but only upon one condition—that is, that you first of all become my wife!"

"Never—never!" said Ellen, shuddering.

"There is a priest outside," said Wild. "He is waiting in the corridor. He is armed with all the necessary forms and documents for the performance of the ceremony. Give your consent, and I will have him brought in. Then, when you are my wife, you shall be set at liberty."

"Never—never!" said Ellen. "Death—death a thousand times before such a terrible existence as that would be! Jonathan Wild, you have shown yourself in your true colours. I shall state all this on the day when I am brought up for trial, and it will be strange indeed if your villany is not made apparent."

"Wild laughed a horrible, mocking laugh, and withdrew.

"But he renewed his solicitations from day to day.

"His patience seemed unwearying.

"He believed in his own mind that he should at last succeed, and that Ellen, rather than perish on the scaffold, would become his wife.

"But each time she repulsed him, and always with additional disgust and contempt.

"Then the day of trial arrived.

"Jonathan Wild was beginning to think that Ellen would remain firm and obstinate.

"At the last hour he renewed his entreaties, declaring even then that it was not too late, and that he could cause a verdict of not guilty to be returned, but if she refused that she would most certainly be sentenced.

"Again came an indignant refusal from her lips.

"Accordingly she was brought up for trial.

"The case was stated in the clearest possible manner, and, despite her beauty and innocent look, every one in the court came to the conclusion that she was guilty before she was allowed the opportunity of saying one word in her own defence.

"Then she had nothing to say but to utter a somewhat disjointed string of accusations against Jonathan Wild.

"They were listened to impatiently.

"She was cut short in her declamation, for Jonathan Wild at that time had only to appear as chief witness against a prisoner and conviction was certain.

CHAPTER DCXLIII.

MR. THORPE BRINGS THE STORY TO A CONCLUSION, AND RELATES HOW THE INNOCENCE OF ELLEN WAS MADE APPARENT.

"The counsel for the prosecution exercised his right of reply, and dwelt at great length upon the enormity of the offence with which Ellen was charged, and the manner in which she had aggravated it by attempting to asperse the character of the indefatigable and excellent police officer, Jonathan Wild.

"As you may easily expect, the result was a verdict of guilty.

"In summing up, the judge stated that he perfectly agreed with the finding of the jury—that there had never been a case before him in which he had been so certain of the guilt of the accused; and therefore it was that he was able, without compunction, to pass upon her the sentence of death, for he considered that she richly deserved it.

"Sobbing and weeping, and indeed half frantic, Ellen was led back to her cell.

"This was Friday, and the Monday following was the day appointed for her execution.

"Will you believe it that, even after this, Jonathan Wild continued to make his odious proposals to his victim?

"But she scorned them as before.

"In vain he assured her that it was in his power to obtain for her a full and free pardon if she consented to his wishes.

"Over and over again she refused.

"What with Jonathan Wild's importunities, and the terrible nature of her position, her mind was in a terrible condition.

"She wasted away almost to a shadow, and the beauty which everyone had praised so much faded rapidly away.

"At last the fatal Monday came.

"She was led through the gloomy corridors of the prison, and placed in the cart that was to convey her to Tyburn.

"According to a common custom with him, Jonathan Wild took his seat in the hangman's cart, along with the chaplain and the condemned prisoner.

"Even during the awful ride, and with death staring her in the face, he renewed his propositions, declaring that even then it was not too late—that a word from him would stay these proceedings, and that she would be pardoned.

"It was plain, however, that Ellen had resigned herself to her fate.

"To some extent she was cheered up and supported by the consciousness of her own innocence, and she preferred death in that ignominious fashion to life associated with such a miscreant as Jonathan Wild.

"The cart was drawn beneath the fatal beam.

"The hangman's fingers busied themselves around her neck.

"The cap was drawn down over her countenance; and even at this awful moment Jonathan Wild stood up beside her in the cart, and asked her again to consider the decision.

"She made no reply.

"Poor girl, she was almost dead with terror.

"Then the signal was given.

"The cart was drawn away, and in another moment all that remained of the beautiful but hapless girl was an inert mass of clay.

"Jonathan Wild had been baulked in his desires.

"But yet he glutted his revenge."

"And was she really hanged?" asked one in the company.

"She was; and after her death her remains were treated as though they had been those of a common felon."

It is impossible to describe the deep interest with

which this narrative was listened to, and, when Mr. Thorpe had concluded, there was in the breasts of all his hearers such a feeling of resentment against Jonathan Wild as they had never before experienced.

Even the one who seemed inclined to take a lenient view of the thief-taker's enormities declared that such a man was equally unfit to live or to die.

"And you are quite sure that she was innocent?" said one.

"Quite sure—as certain as I am that I am innocent myself. She was quite guileless, and afterwards I found out who it was that was the real culprit, and how the girl's apparent guilt had been brought about."

"How was it?" asked all, eagerly.

"I one day entered a rude, miserable hut in a lonely portion of the country, not far from the village in which Ellen had lived.

"This was some years after her death, when the circumstances were almost forgotten.

"I entered this hut because, while passing by it, I heard cries of distress from within.

"I entered, and saw, lying on a heap of rotten straw in one corner of it, the cadaverous figure of a man.

"I walked up to him, and asked him what I could do for his assistance.

"He told me nothing—that he was dying, and that no earthly power could save him—that he had in him at the most only a few minutes' life.

"Something in the tones of his voice sounded familiarly in my ears.

"I looked at him attentively, and then I said:

"'Why, surely I am not mistaken? Is not your name Hutton?'"

"'It is,' he said, with a start. 'It doesn't matter now that you have recognised me, for I am out of the power of my fellow-creatures.'

"This was a strange speech, but I perfectly understood it.

"He had been found guilty many years ago of having some share in a robbery, and had been sentenced to transportation for life.

"But he had escaped, and made his way back to his own village.

"Ah!" he said, 'your name is Thorpe. I know you now. I am dying, but yet I have something to say to you, if you will only listen. It's about poor Ellen and Jonathan Wild.'

"What is it?" I said—"what is it?—speak!"

"Well, at the time when she was charged with the robbery I had only just returned from abroad.

"I was lurking about at the back of the squire's house among the underwood, and while I was there, I was almost frightened to death by the appearance of the man I most dreaded on earth, namely, Jonathan Wild.

"He, too, had been lurking in the shrubbery—though for what purpose I knew not.

"I saw him creep stealthily towards the house. I saw him ascend some steps that were placed against a wall, and by means of them gained the roof of the out-buildings.

"He made his way to a particular window which was open, and, leaning forward, almost got through it.

"He was very speedy in all his movements, and soon returned, and I saw that in his hand he had a little velvet box."

"Why did you not raise an alarm?" I said. "Why did you not bring all the household about you, so that the villain might have been detected in his rascality?"

"The convict shook his head.

"I dared not do anything of the kind," he replied. "It was necessary for my own life that I should remain concealed—I did not dare disclose myself."

"And what else did you see?"

"Nothing. Jonathan Wild departed, though where he went I knew not.

"Finding he was in that part of the country, I knew it would not be safe for me to remain there any longer; so, with what speed I could, I hastened away and crossed over into Ireland.

"There I led a wandering, restless life for a length of time, until eventually I returned home.

"I learned then what had followed the simple robbery I saw Jonathan Wild perform.

"When I found that in consequence of it poor Ellen

had lost her life, I bitterly regretted my own selfishness.

"I did indeed deserve my fate. It was no more than just that I should be transported, and I would willingly have returned and endured all the horrors of penal servitude, could I only have been successful in proving her innocence."

"Some more words passed between us, but he had nothing further of any importance to communicate."

"I set out myself for the village doctor, but by the time we returned the convict was dead, and so, my friends, ends this little episode in Jonathan Wild's career."

"There are many more such if they could only be told."

"You know now, why I am sad and melancholy—you know much, but not all."

CHAPTER DCXLIV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN RENEW THEIR SEARCH
AFTER JONATHAN WILD.

MR. THORPE rose abruptly to his feet as he concluded.

By this time the storm was over.

The rain no longer fell, and the clouds were rapidly scudding over the sky, allowing the clear blue ornament to be seen, and the thousands of twinkling stars.

He fixed his hat upon his head, and then, like one who feels that he must give way to some powerful emotion, he turned round and left the inn.

After his departure a silence of several minutes reigned, which neither Blueskin nor Jack Sheppard ventured to break.

Everyone present was busy with his own thoughts.

Believing, however, that they had heard all of any importance, Blueskin and Jack resolved to continue their journey.

The state of the weather was now quite favourable.

Accordingly, they emptied their drinking-cups, and made their way towards the stables.

"You see, gentlemen," said Joe, coming forward, "that I was quite right when I said we should have a rough night."

"You were."

"However, the violence of the storm is past; I think we shall have fine weather for some time to come."

"Then bring out the horses," said Jack Sheppard. "Be as quick as you like—we are anxious to start."

"And," said Blueskin, "can you tell us the sign of that public-house you were telling me of where Wild and Noakes stole the two horses?"

"Yes, sir, I can. I recollect it now, though I could not at first; it's the Ring of Bells."

"I shall not forget it."

"But that reminds me I made a mistake. Did I not tell you the landlord's name was Goodridge?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was wrong. Timothy Goodridge used to live there, but he has left many years."

"And who keeps the inn, now?"

"A man named Muggleton. He is a stupid, thick-headed fellow; but yet you may be able to learn something from him."

Having again inquired the best way to this inn, Blueskin and Jack gave the ostler a liberal sum, and, mounting their horses, rode off.

"Now," said Blueskin, "what do you think we had better do?"

"Why, ride straight on to this public-house."

"I think so, too; it is useless for us to follow in his footsteps so exactly as that. We know now the last place where he was seen, and we must go there and recommence our inquiries."

"Just so; we will proceed gently though, so as not to distress our horses."

"Yes, it will be best to husband their strength, for we cannot tell at what moment it may be necessary to put them to the top of their speed."

"That was a strange story," said Jack, "that we heard a little while ago."

"Very strange; and, as I happen to know, very true."

"Indeed! Do you remember the girl?"

"Yes, quite well; though never until to-night did I

learn the whole of the particulars of the affair. It was a villainous deed, yet just such a one as Jonathan Wild would be capable of."

"You are right. Who should say how many such cases there are if they could only be brought to light?"

"No one can estimate them," was the answer. "But do you observe what a general feeling of hatred and detestation is growing up against the man in every breast?"

"I do."

"Well, then, the result of that must be certain; he cannot long continue his present course; he must infallibly be captured."

"So I think, and it will be strange indeed if we are not active instruments in his arrest."

"Did it strike you that Mr. Thorpe had a keen interest in the story that he told—I mean that it was in some way connected with his own life?"

"Yes, I drew my conclusions from it at once. The meaning of his reserve and melancholy is quite explained; it is this which preys upon his spirits and makes him ever gloomy; he cannot forget the past."

"You think, then, that this Ellen, who fell a victim to Jonathan's machinations, was very near and dear to him?"

"I do—I feel certain of it. He must have loved her, or he would not have spoken of her in the way he did."

"I noticed his voice fail him several times."

"So did I; and he is not the man to give way lightly to emotions, I am sure of it. It will be a serious thing for Jonathan if he once finds himself face to face with Mr. Thorpe."

"It will. But don't talk any longer upon this subject—I cannot bear to dwell upon it. When I remember all his villainous acts, I seem to become so impatient that I lose all control over myself."

"And no wonder."

It was in similar conversation to this that the time was whiled away during which the two friends journeyed to the Ring of Bells.

The distance was considerable, yet, by keeping their horses to one steady pace, they managed to arrive at the public-house soon after sunrise.

The place presented much the appearance that it did when Wild and Noakes had arrived there almost at the same hour many days before.

The red rays of the sun were then shining upon the ancient, picturesque-looking dwelling, and the landlord himself was engaged in removing the shutters from the front windows.

He made quite a respectful bow to the two friends, and asked them if they intended to take refreshment.

Blueskin answered in the affirmative.

The horses were then placed in the stable, and Jack and Blueskin seated themselves in a private room.

They called the landlord to them and asked him many questions concerning Jonathan Wild.

The landlord had not yet got over his loss, and the very mention of Wild's name put him into a furious passion.

But upon Jack explaining what their intentions were, he very gladly gave them all the information in his power.

Unluckily this was not much.

He could only tell them that after stealing those two valuable horses out of his stable, the two villains had galloped off at such a furious speed that the officers were unable to overtake them.

Beyond this, the only information they obtained was that a traveller had been robbed and seriously injured by Jonathan Wild, not many miles from that spot.

What had been their movements after that time, the landlord could give them no idea.

This was somewhat of a disappointment, for they had hoped to learn as much here as at their last resting-place.

They made the landlord describe as well as he could the exact spot where the robbery had taken place.

They then took their departure, and, mounting their steeds, rode off along the highway.

Ere long they reached the spot that had been described to them.

All traces of the struggle that had taken place here had gone.



[JONATHAN WILD'S HORSE FALLS DEAD ON THE HIGHWAY.]

They paused and looked at each other doubtfully and irresolutely.

"What are we to do now?" asked Jack.

"The trace seems to end here," replied Blueskin; "but do not let us be too hasty—surely something will turn up to guide us."

"I hope so, but can't think what."

"Nor I; but we do know that he came as far as here. Let us make this a kind of starting point, and ride out in different directions from it. We shall doubtless meet with many disappointments, but at length we must hit upon the right track."

This was about the best mode of proceeding that could be adopted under the circumstances."

In carrying out their intention, they perceived the pool of water in which it will be remembered Jonathan Wild bathed his wound.

Then afterwards, as they extended their search still No. 139.—BLUESKIN.

further and further from the spot where the robbery had taken place, they perceived the strange, old, mysterious building in which Wild and Noakes had taken refuge, and which had been the scene of such a dreadful tragedy.

Blueskin and Jack paused upon a piece of rising ground at some distance, and surveyed it attentively.

"What do you think of that?" asked Jack. "Shall we get any information there?"

"It is just possible," was the reply. "It is a strange, deserted-looking place—in fact, just the building in which Wild would be likely to take refuge from his foes."

CHAPTER DCXLV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES DEMAND SHELTER OF THE CHARCOAL-BURNER.

THE scene that was presented to the view of Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes upon reaching that small open space

in the forest was indeed a strange one, and well calculated to transfix them to the spot.

The clearing was only a few square yards in extent, and on the opposite side of it was burning a huge fire.

Not much flame came from it, but only smoke, which rose up in great quantities, growing denser and denser each moment.

A great number of logs of green wood had been placed upon the fire, which at first had the effect of almost extinguishing it.

Then the smoke began to rise.

It was a huge heap that was smoking and smouldering, and neither Wild nor Noakes could tell at first what was the meaning of so strange a sight.

Seated on the stump of an old tree was a dirt-begrimed man, who held in his hands a long pole, or piece of iron, with which he continually stirred the fire.

At first he did not perceive the approach of Wild and Noakes, he was so intently occupied with what he was about, and they, as we have already said, paused at the boundary of the clearing.

Behind this man there was a rude wooden structure—a hut, in fact, the exterior of which had been plastered in many places with clay in order to keep out the wet and cold.

Behind this hut the ground rose suddenly into a hill.

Doubtless that situation had been chosen for the hut because the hill at the back would protect it from the violence of many a storm.

After a momentary hesitation as to what he should do, Jonathan Wild resolved to step forward and endeavour to obtain shelter of this man.

Accordingly, making a sign to his companion to follow his example, he led his horse forward by the bridle.

The sound of approaching footsteps attracted the man's attention, and he stood up, regarding them curiously, and, as Wild thought, with some degree of alarm.

"What do you want with me, gentlemen?" asked this man, with an air of abject humility—"what is it you require? I am only a poor charcoal-burner in this wood. What do you want with me?"

"Shelter," said Wild—"nothing but shelter, for ourselves and our horses, for a few hours. We will pay you liberally if you consent. Here—look, here is a guinea."

The man shook his head.

"I have no shelter to give you," he replied—"I cannot do it."

"But that hut is yours, is it not?"

"Yes," replied the charcoal-burner, though not without some hesitation.

"Well, then, that hut, rude as it is, will furnish us with all the shelter we require."

"But why do you want shelter?"

"That's a strange question, truly, but it strikes me I know your face."

"Know my face?" said the charcoal-burner, with a start.

"Yes, and, if I am right, you are not following your regular trade."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, simply this: The grabs are after us both,—we have had a hard run for it, and now want to get somewhere out of sight."

The charcoal-burner whistled.

"Is that it?" he said.

"Yes, that's exactly it; and so if you have any good hiding-place, let us know of it—you can guess that we shall pay you well."

"I don't doubt it—I don't doubt it."

"Well, do you consent?"

"I can't on my own responsibility. Wait here a moment, and I will tell you."

"Be quick, for I expect that we shall hear something of the police officers every moment."

With another hard stare at the two strangers, the charcoal-burner entered the hut and disappeared.

"What has he gone for?" asked Mr. Noakes.

"To consult some of his comrades, probably."

"Comrades?"

"Yes—don't be alarmed. But I know that man's face, and I will warrant he is only here along with a gang more."

Mr. Noakes seemed rather alarmed.

"Follow me," said Wild—"I will just take a peep inside, and see what he is doing."

He advanced towards the door of the hut as he spoke. He pushed against it.

But it was fast.

"He is a cunning fox," he said. "I doubt now whether I shall be able to obtain a glimpse of the interior."

Nevertheless, Jonathan was inspired by great curiosity, so he prowled about, round and round the building, endeavouring to find some little hole through which to peep.

But he tried in vain.

Suddenly the door of the hut opened, and the charcoal-burner appeared.

"Well," said Wild, "what's your answer? Quick!—let me know it without delay!"

"You shall have shelter," was the reply—"that is, provided you pay well for it, and that the officers have not tracked you exactly to this spot."

"Agreed!" said Wild, eagerly—"agreed!"

"Follow me, then."

"And the horses—what shall we do with them?"

"Bring them in too."

Wild did not hesitate, but obeyed.

The charcoal-burner closed the door, and then the interior of the hut was in profound darkness.

"Walk boldly onwards!" he said. "There is no obstruction in your path—step fearlessly!"

"Cannot we have a light?"

"No—it is impossible! Be silent, and follow me!"

The charcoal-burner was just then in a position to dictate his own terms.

Noakes and Wild were compelled to obey him implicitly.

They walked on for some distance—certainly much further than the mere diameter of the hut.

About this, however, there was no certainty, for the darkness was most profound.

Suddenly the charcoal-burner said:

"Stop!"

A knocking sound followed.

Then a door was opened, and a gleam of light shone into the passage, for such it was.

Through this door Wild and Noakes could see something that looked like a large cavern.

"Forward!" said the charcoal-burner—"forward!"

Jonathan assumed an air of boldness and recklessness.

Passing through the doorway, which was immediately closed behind them, Wild and Noakes found themselves—as they expected they should—in a large, vaulted cavern.

In various parts of it lights were burning, not in sufficient quantity or brightness to dispel the darkness in this place, but yet to render most objects to a certain extent visible.

Seated round various rude tables, and in some cases squatting on the floor, were several men—a dozen at least.

All rose up tumultuously upon the entrance of the two strangers.

"Here, comrades," said the charcoal-burner—"here are the men I spoke of that wanted shelter. They are willing to pay well."

"Who are you?" said several, pressing forward and endeavouring to obtain a good view of the countenances of Wild and Noakes—"who are you?"

"Members of the family in London," returned Wild, boldly. "We have been hard pushed by the grabs, but managed to get here all right. When they find we have disappeared, and that they have no trace left of us, they will give up the chase."

"How long do you want to stay?"

"Not more than twenty-four hours."

"You will have to pay liberally."

"I am quite willing to do that," was Wild's reply.

"The fact is, we are running no small amount of risk," said one of the men. "Our leader is absent. We don't know exactly when he may return. He might be anything but pleased if he found a stranger had been admitted to this place in his absence, so we should be glad for you to go before he comes back, then it will be entirely a private affair of our own, you understand."

"I am quite willing to fall in with any reasonable

views of yours," said Wild. "You will have no cause to grumble at the payment; it will be larger than you imagine. With much difficulty we have got thus far. We are anxious to reach the sea-coast and leave England."

"Very good; promise to go in twenty-four hours, and all will be well. I feel almost certain that our leader will not return before that time has elapsed."

CHAPTER DCXLVI.

THE POLICE OFFICERS KEEP VERY CLOSE UPON THE TRACK OF JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES.

THERE could be but little doubt about the nature of the occupation that these men pursued.

They evidently lived in defiance of the laws.

They were certainly poachers, if nothing worse.

Several of them, however, Jonathan Wild found he recognised.

In his time he had had a large acquaintance with all those predatory wretches, and as he had an excellent memory, he was able to say to himself, with certainty:

"I have seen you before; but I can't recollect who you are, nor where it was I saw you."

On the other hand, many curious glances were bent upon Jonathan Wild and his companion.

But they had been so changed, by the number of adventures they had lately passed through, and by the difference in their apparel and general appearance, that it would have been next to an impossibility for anyone having a casual knowledge of either to have recognised them.

Jonathan Wild, for his part, felt as easy and confident as he would had he been carefully and cleverly disguised—perhaps more so.

Many questions were asked them by these men in the cavern.

But Jonathan returned guarded answers to all of them.

"Why should you seek to know my business?" he asked of one more inquisitive than the rest. "I have come, and seen certain things, but I do not keep perpetually demanding why this is so, and what the regular routine of your life may be."

This was felt to be a just and reasonable remark, so that no more was said upon the subject.

The hours gradually succeeded each other without any signal of alarm having been given.

Some eatables and drinkables had been placed before Wild and Noakes, of which they had gladly partaken.

Then they had laid themselves down by the fire to sleep.

The men in the cavern were for the most part very silent.

When they spoke to each other, it was in low whispers, so faint that not a single word could by any possibility reach the ears of anyone but the person for whom the communication was intended.

And in this manner the time passed by, until almost twenty-four hours had elapsed.

Mr. Noakes was quite anxious to leave, for during the whole of the time they had been in this strange place they had heard nothing whatever of their enemies.

The cavern was, as the reader must already have suspected, neither more nor less than a place hollowed out under the hill we have mentioned as being situated at the back of the hut.

From the rude wooden building there was a means of communication with the passage that led direct to the cavernous apartment, if such it may be called.

Suddenly one of the men started to his feet, and assumed a listening attitude.

Then, with an air of vexation, he exclaimed:

"It is as I feared, the captain has returned! A thousand to one we shall get into trouble for this disregard of orders!"

All seemed anxious, and scarcely any were less so than Wild and Noakes.

They would gladly have made their escape there and then, had such a thing been possible.

But it was quite out of the question, and they knew it.

The sound of rapid footsteps now came upon their ears, and directly afterwards the door was flung open and a tall, stout-built man strode into the cavern.

His brows were contracted into an angry frown, and he glanced around him quickly and suspiciously.

"I am told that strangers have been admitted to the cave in my absence! Mark this, whoever has done so shall be well punished!"

"Surely, captain," said one, "it can't much matter."

"Matter!" he interrupted, furiously—"it does matter, and perhaps you will think so when I tell you that the whole forest is swarming with police officers, who are peeping and prying into every part of it, making a thorough search. It is scarcely possible that this hut will escape them, and then you know our fate!"

He made an expressive gesture while he spoke.

"We knew the officers were abroad," they said, "but they were two members of the family who were in trouble, and we thought it little harm to give them shelter; they will depart in an hour or so."

"Let me see them," cried the captain—"bring them before me. I have a suspicion in my mind, which, if it is valid—but no matter now—bring them forward."

At the first sight of the leader of this gang, Jonathan Wild had started back several paces.

He clenched his teeth together in the bitterness of his rage.

He recognised him, or believed he had done so, which was about the same thing.

He was confirmed as soon as the captain spoke, for he knew the tones of his voice quite well.

He was a man who had at one time been entirely in Wild's power, as many others had been in days past.

But he had contrived to shake himself free from his trammels, and was now acting in an independent position.

If he could but once glance into his countenance, Wild felt sure it would be sufficient for recognition.

They had known each other too well in times past for there to be any doubt or hesitation.

What would follow that recognition Jonathan knew full well.

He could look for no pity from this man.

He would be even more relentless than any of the police officers.

What was he to do?

While the brief conversation we have recorded was going forward, he had gradually retreated to the opposite side of the cavern, dragging his companion with him.

"What is it?" said Noakes, in a whisper. "What's the danger?"

"No matter! Leave it to me—it is greater than you imagine; but we shall escape yet, I am sure of it."

Just then there came a heavy sound from above.

It was a sound evidently that was recognised by all the inmates of the cavern.

The captain uttered a fearful oath, and the men gathered around him.

"The officers are in the hut!" he said. "Now each one must look to his own safety. We must fly. This will be a bad day's work for us. Rely upon it, all will be discovered."

The hubbub in the distance increased, and so did the alarm of the banditti.

Jonathan Wild had taken the utmost advantage of this diversion.

He had reached the opposite side of the cavern.

And then he made a discovery which could hardly be said to take him by surprise.

He noticed that close to the ground were a great number of rudely-formed arches, evidently the commencement of passages.

These he rightly conjectured had been constructed in anticipation of some such danger as the present.

The hill was in fact tunnelled in every direction, so that in a few minutes the banditti could disperse, and, by hastening along these passages, emerge into the wood.

Jonathan Wild did not hesitate to plunge into the darkness immediately, and Mr. Noakes was too terrified to do anything else but follow his example.

The narrow passage curved and wound about in a very tiresome manner; but at length, in the distance, Jonathan perceived the faint glimmering of light.

Several hours had elapsed during their stay in the cavern, and now night was about to descend upon the earth.

Without any accident, or any loss of time, Jonathan

reached the mouth of this passage, which, as he fully expected, was situated in the side of the hill.

After a cautious glance around him, he crept out.

At present, nothing of his foes could be seen.

"Come, Noakes," he said—"forward—forward! Everything now depends upon speed, and the probability is, we shall elude them after all!"

"I doubt it."

"I don't see what cause you have to do so; the officers will discover something strange about the charcoal-burner's hut, and they will devote all their attention to exploring it—it will take them some little time, and while they are doing so, can't you see that it allows us the chance of getting away?"

"Yes. But suppose they should have left several on the watch?"

"That risk must be run."

"And our horses," said Noakes—"what are we to do without them?"

"That is the most difficult point. I am trying to think by what means we can manage to regain possession of them."

"I fear it will be impossible."

"Well, better lose our horses than become prisoners ourselves—don't you think so?"

"I do, and yet it is vexatious to think we should get so near to the coast and then be troubled by the officers after all."

"It is nothing!" said Wild—"you magnify the danger! Come forward, quickly! Follow me!"

Jonathan pushed rapidly through the trees.

"Don't forget the treasure!" said Noakes, in a low voice.

"Don't be afraid of that!" returned Wild. "But hush! Advance with caution—I fancy some of our enemies are close at hand! Come on, I say; but be cautious and silent—an alarm will be fatal!"

CHAPTER DCXLVII.

JONATHAN WILD LOSES HIS HORSE.

THESE words put Mr. Noakes into a state of great consternation.

But not so Jonathan Wild.

He crept forward with a cautiousness that would have done credit to an Indian on the war-trail.

Then suddenly he paused.

Darkness was coming on very rapidly, but yet it was not already so dark but that he could see objects at no great distance off.

He perceived, then, a police officer leaning against a tree.

It may seem strange that he should be in such a position; but the fact is, he had been left there by his comrades to take care of the horses, which were ranged round about him.

Wild pressed his hand heavily on Noakes's shoulder, but said nothing.

Mr. Noakes took it as a signal to remain where he was—to neither move nor speak.

Jonathan crept on towards the officer, making a considerable detour in order to do so.

His heart was full of exultation, for he saw before him the means by which he should be able to make his escape from the forest.

He would seize two horses, mount, and ride off.

Doubtless, if the officers were in the cavern, he should be able to get a good start before they found out what was amiss.

The chief thing was to silence the officer who had been left there on the watch, and this was the task that Jonathan Wild set about accomplishing.

How he was to do this, Wild scarcely knew.

It must not be thought that he would have shrunk at putting this officer to death, if by doing so he could have ensured his own safety.

On the contrary, he would have felt a great amount of triumph at having made his enemies one less.

It would satisfy, to some extent, the craving for revenge which he still felt.

The death of the officer must be accomplished without a sound.

But how could this be done?

While meditating, Jonathan was creeping slowly but surely towards his victim.

In his progress, his foot caught against something.

The feeling almost told him what it was.

He stooped, and found that it was a piece of strong rope, several feet in length.

"The very thing," he said, under his breath—"the very thing!"

He crept forward now with renewed confidence, until he actually succeeded in gaining the tree against which the officer was leaning, without being perceived—that is to say, he gained the opposite side of it.

It was quite a slender tree, comparatively speaking, for Jonathan was able to encircle it with his arms.

In one hand he held one end of the rope.

With a rapidity of motion which can scarcely be conceived, he slipped this rope round the tree, taking care that it should catch just underneath the officer's neck.

Before the unfortunate man could understand what was going on, or form a guess as to what it meant, Jonathan Wild had, with incredible quickness, tied a knot in the rope, and he was striving with might and main to draw it tight.

The pressure upon the officer's throat became fearful.

At first an odd gurgling sound had issued from his lips.

But now this died away entirely.

Jonathan tied the rope into several knots, and then glided round the tree.

The officer was struggling furiously to release himself.

But in vain.

The more he tugged and struggled, the more he increased the tightness of the rope round his neck.

Wild laughed a hideous laugh of triumph, and but for the necessity of making an immediate retreat he would have stood for some time gazing upon the struggles of his victim.

He called out to Noakes, who speedily made his appearance.

"Now, then," cried Jonathan, "mount one of these horses—whichever you think is the best. Be quick, and we are safe!"

Noakes chose as good a horse as his hurry would permit, and sprang upon his back.

Wild did the same.

The officer by this time had turned quite black in the face, and it was only occasionally that his arms moved slightly.

"You have killed him," said Noakes.

"If I have, so much the better!" was the brutal reply.

"He is one police officer less! At any rate, I have stopped him from giving an alarm."

Noakes could not avoid shuddering at his companion's atrocity.

But the feeling was soon over, and he said:

"The treasure, Mr. Wild—don't forget that."

"I have not forgotten. This is the way to the spot where we left it, unless I am out of my reckoning. Quick—the sooner we are out of this forest now the better."

"Very true," said Noakes, "for who can say how soon the officers will make their way out of the cavern by the same means that we did?"

"I expect to hear something of them every moment," returned Wild. "But stop, here is the heap of stones."

"Will you alight, or shall I?"

"I will," said Wild. "I shall be quicker than you."

And as he spoke he flung himself hastily from his horse, and began dashing the stones aside with which he had covered the booty.

He seized hold of the first package, and handed it to Noakes.

Then, taking the second, he mounted.

Loud cries from behind them smote upon his ears.

But he did not falter, or lose his presence of mind.

"Now, then, Noakes," he said, "gallop on for your life! Don't stick at a little danger! Forward—forward, I say—follow me!"

Jonathan goaded the horse he rode fiercely, and the creature, maddened by pain, galloped on at a more rapid rate than it had probably ever before accomplished.

Going at such a breakneck pace as they did it re-

quired only a few moments to take them clear of the forest.

Mr. Noakes kept behind Jonathan like a shadow.

The latter directed his course across the open country, and, from the direction he was taking, it seemed as though he was really and truly making his way to the sea-shore.

Mr. Noakes thought so too, and this inspired him with greater courage and energy to follow his companion.

The police officers, however, had discovered their escape, and were now pressing forward with great speed.

The loud cries to which they frequently gave utterance came with alarming plainness upon the ears of the fugitives.

But fortune had certainly favoured the two villains on this occasion.

The horses they had stolen were superior in fleetness to any of the others that remained.

Away, then, they went over the broken, uneven country at a speed that would have dismayed an ordinary rider on account of the many dangers that attended it.

But somehow they kept in their seats quite safely.

The horses stumbled once or twice, but did not fall.

They recovered their feet, and darted onwards with renewed speed.

And during the whole of that night did that terrific chase continue.

From time to time both felt their horses stagger underneath them as though they would fall to the ground and expire.

One by one the police officers dropped off as their horses from fatigue became unable to proceed further.

They were in a part of the country where it was impossible to obtain fresh steeds.

And so, towards daybreak, Jonathan found, upon turning his head, that he had only one pursuer left, and that he was a long way behind them.

But his own horse continued to show the most unequivocal symptoms of total exhaustion.

"Don't flag!" he said, addressing Noakes. "Spur him on with all your might! If you once suffer him to relax his speed he will never attain it again! Keep him on—do as I do! You will find they will run till they drop!"

Jonathan Wild's words turned out to be perfectly correct.

The exhausted animals, smarting with the pain which continual plunges with the spur occasioned them, galloped forward at a furious rate.

But every now and then their limbs would tremble.

They were covered all over with foam, and their hot, swollen tongues hung out at their open mouths.

Suddenly, with a crash, Jonathan's horse fell to the ground.

Its legs gave way beneath it all at once, and when it fell, it was as though it had been struck down by some mighty and invisible power.

CHAPTER DCXLVIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES SEEK SHELTER AT THE FARM-HOUSE.

ALTHOUGH prepared for this event, the horse fell down so suddenly that before he could save himself Jonathan Wild was thrown over his head.

Luckily, he alighted in a ditch.

It was by no means a pleasant bath.

Yet it was much better than falling with full force on the hard high-road.

In the latter case he must have been killed, or, at any rate, severely injured.

As it was, the only inconvenience he experienced was a thorough wetting from head to foot.

Mr. Noakes observed the fate of his companion with dismay.

Fearful that he, too, might have a fall, he stopped his horse and alighted.

The animal trembled in every limb, and panted fearfully, as though it had reached the very last stage of exhaustion.

He then hastened to the side of the ditch, and assisted his companion out of it.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Wild?" he said.

Jonathan did not reply.

He was half stunned and half blinded.

"Curse the brute!" he said at length, as soon as he could recover his voice. "Who would have thought of his going down so suddenly as that?"

"I feared it."

"So did I."

"And what are we to do now, Mr. Wild?"

"Do?"

"Yes. How far is it to the sea-shore, and how shall we reach it?"

Jonathan paused.

He was recovering himself.

He rose to his feet, and shook the moisture from his apparel.

"There are some things we must think about before that," he answered. "In the first place, where are our foes?"

They listened.

But all was still.

Unsatisfied as yet, however, Jonathan laid himself down at full length in the road, and pressed his ear against the ground.

Even then he failed to hear any sound that would indicate their approach.

"They are not within some miles of this place," he said, "so at least we shall be allowed time to complete our operations."

"What operations?"

"Why, do you see that dead brute lying there?"

"Your horse?"

"Yes."

"What of him?"

"It will not do to allow him to remain there, will it?"

"Why not?"

"Why, will not the officers, should they find him here, at once know that we are on foot, and redouble their exertions to capture us?"

"Yes, yes—of course they would."

"Well, then, you must assist me by some means or other to drag the brute into a field, and leave him there—the officers will then ride by without being any the wiser."

"I am glad you thought of that, Mr. Wild. And what am I to do with my own horse?"

"It is well you asked that question. Look at him! He is trembling in every limb, and seems as though he was about to fall. Quick—quick! We will lead him into the field. His eyes are glazing! There is not ten minutes' life left in him!"

Mr. Noakes's horse presented every appearance of the approach of death.

Beyond doubt, had he been ridden hard much longer, he would have dropped down suddenly like Wild's did.

But coming to a stop just at that time lengthened his life to the extent of a few minutes.

That he would fall down presently and expire was certain, and Jonathan was anxious to spare himself the trouble, if he could, of having to drag the carcass into the field.

Close by was a gate, which, by the aid of a heavy stone, he broke open.

Then, calling out to Mr. Noakes, he bade him lead his horse by the bridle.

At first the animal refused to stir.

All use and strength seemed to have departed from its limbs.

But a sharp blow caused it to move forward at a slow, shuffling pace.

Noakes half dragged it through the gate, and scarcely had it gone a dozen yards into the field before it fell down as though shot.

It was a large corn-field into which they had intruded, and the tall ears completely hid the fallen horse from view.

"He is settled!" said Wild. "It's lucky mine fell so near such a convenient place as this is. Now, then, our heaviest task is before us."

They returned again to the road, and, seizing hold of the horse, attempted to drag it.

At first they feared the task was one altogether beyond their power, and that they should never have strength to accomplish it.

But, little by little, inch by inch, they dragged it along, gradually getting it nearer to the gate.

At length they managed, after more than half an hour's incredible labour, to get it just inside the field.

And here they left it.

It was not so well concealed from view as the other one, but yet Jonathan thought sufficiently well to answer their purpose.

"Now, Noakes," he said, "pick up your bundle and carry it—I will do the like."

"May I ask where you are going now, Mr. Wild?"

"I can scarcely tell you at present, except that I am going to quit the high-road. I see there is a footpath along one side of this field. We will make our way along it."

Noakes saw at once that this at least presented some prospect of eluding their foes, so he acquiesced willingly.

They followed the footpath for a considerable distance, crossing several stiles, until at length they found themselves at no great distance from a large farm-house.

Wild looked at the building for some moments in silence, and then he said, abruptly:

"I think we will stay there, Noakes."

"Stay there?" ejaculated his companion, in surprise.

"Yes; could you not understand what I said?"

"But I could scarcely believe it. Why do you wish to stay?"

"Because it will be best to do so; if we make a halt there for a time, our foes will probably pass us, and it will be much better to have them before than behind us."

To this Noakes assented.

And yet he did not like the idea of stopping.

"We shall never reach the sea-shore," he thought.

Aware, from former experience, that when Jonathan Wild had decided upon any course, it was quite useless to attempt to persuade him to do otherwise, Mr. Noakes resigned himself to his fate, and followed.

Jonathan walked straight to the farm-house, nor did he pause until they reached a large open shed.

"What are you staying for?" asked Mr. Noakes.

"We will hide our bundles here," was the reply.

"And what shall you do then?"

"Why, walk up to the farm-house, and ask for shelter; the chances are a thousand to one that we shall get it. If so, why, all will be well. In the morning we can start for the sea."

"I think it would be best to keep right on now."

"No doubt you do, but I am of a different opinion, and you must allow me to decide; so say no more about that—it will be useless."

Noakes knew that, and therefore was silent.

They secreted the two bundles in the shed, and then continued their way towards the homestead.

"You ask for admission," said Wild. "Tell them we are poor folks on our way to the sea-coast. I will keep in the background,—you are not so likely to be recognised as I am."

This arrangement made, the pair proceeded.

Halting at last before the front door, Noakes knocked loudly for admission.

The loud baying of a dog followed.

Then the door opened, and a rough but good-tempered voice said:

"Who are you? What in the world do you want?"

"Two poor travellers," was Noakes's reply. "We want to ask you for a few hours' lodging. We are poor, and on our way to the sea-coast."

"Let them in," said a cheerful voice from within—"let them come in—it would be a sin not to be hospitable."

Thus invited, Noakes and Wild entered.

They shrank back rather from the light that proceeded from the fire burning on the hearth.

They were well aware that the inhabitants of the farm-house would not be prepossessed by their appearance.

"We are poor, humble men," said Noakes, in a cringing tone of voice, "and have met with nothing but misfortunes. Many thanks to you all for your kindness in giving us admission. We have applied at many places, but always in vain."

The farmer seated in the chimney corner did not wonder at it, and from the bottom of his heart wished he had not so readily invited them to enter.

Had he seen them, he would certainly have sent them off about their business.

Now, he considered, it was too late; and as he had always from his infancy been impressed with the virtue of hospitality, he ordered preparations to be made for a substantial meal.

Of this Wild and Noakes were invited to partake, and they ate eagerly.

Then lights were called for, and they were shown into a small room at the top of the house—a garret, in fact, situated just underneath the thatch, and reached from the floor below it by means of a ladder and a trap-door.

In one corner was a rude bed, and on this they were told they could repose themselves.

CHAPTER DCXLIX.

JONATHAN WILD MAKES AN UNGRATEFUL RETURN FOR THE HOSPITALITY THAT HAS BEEN SHOWN HIM.

JONATHAN WILD made no attempt to retire to rest.

He seated himself down upon the edge of the bed.

"Curse these people!" he said—"how I hate them!"

"Hate them?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"For the manner in which they treated us. Had they been kind and hospitable, I would have done them no harm. Now——"

"Now what?" said Noakes, in terror.

"Oh, I don't mean them any harm now!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, this: These farmers are never without a large sum of ready money in their houses. We are inside the building, Noakes, and it will go hard with me but I will find out where he keeps his store."

"And is this the return you would make to them for having listened to your application for shelter?"

"Bah! Be quiet! Can you not see that my sole desire is to obtain as much wealth as I can before we leave England? You will be contented enough when all is done, I'll warrant."

Mr. Noakes felt doubtful.

"You can lie down outside the bed, and take a rest for a short time, if you like. I sha'n't commence my operations at present—I shall wait until all have retired to slumber; then I will arouse you."

Noakes was weary and sick of life altogether, so he flung himself with a sigh upon the bed.

Jonathan remained sitting still, listening patiently to every sound.

By degrees, however, complete silence reigned.

Yet he waited and waited until the very dead of night, when he imagined all the inmates of the place would be sound asleep.

Then he touched Noakes upon the shoulder.

"Come," he said, "get up quietly, and make no noise—the time has come."

"Mr. Wild, you are mad—I am sure of it—quite insane, or you would not think of committing such an act as you now contemplate."

"Bah! Be quiet!"

"Instead of taking every precaution," continued Noakes, unheedingly, "and keeping as quiet as you can, you will raise a regular hue and cry after us!"

"Be quiet, I tell you! I will not hear you speak. Come on!"

Jonathan crept on tip-toe towards the top of the ladder.

He listened.

But all was perfectly silent below.

Then gently he lowered himself through the aperture, bidding Noakes in a low whisper to follow him, and to make no noise in doing so.

The bottom of the ladder was reached without any alarm having been given.

The place was rather dark, but not very, and Jonathan had been long enough in the attic for his eyes to grow accustomed to the obscurity.

He was able to see with sufficient distinctness to answer his purpose.

In which room the farmer himself might be sleeping he did not know.

This, however, must be found out, for in this room it was most probable the money would be found.

Jonathan hesitated for several moments before he ventured to open any one of the doors that were on both sides of him.

At length, feeling certain that hesitation was useless, he advanced to one, raised the latch quietly, and pushed it back a little way upon its hinges, just far enough, however, to allow him to glide in.

It was a bed-chamber that he had entered.

But whether the right one or not he could not tell.

The sound of some one breathing heavily came distinctly upon his ears.

He motioned for Noakes to remain standing on the threshold.

Then, like some evil spirit, he glided into the room.

He went first to the bedside and endeavoured to ascertain whether it was really the farmer who was lying there.

Of this he could not be certain.

So he resolved to search the room, and pocket whatever valuables he was able to find.

Nothing was lying about, however, that he considered worth his while to carry away.

Against one wall, however, was an old-fashioned piece of furniture, containing several drawers.

It looked, he thought, a likely place for him to find what he was in search of.

One after another he opened the drawers, and found that only one was fast.

Those that opened to his hand he did not trouble to peep into.

The one that resisted him he felt certain contained the wealth that he coveted.

Taking a large clasp-knife from his pocket, he went to work at the bolt of the lock.

He introduced the point of the blade between the top of the drawer and the case into which it fitted.

There were a few ineffectual efforts, but the only sound was a faint scratching one, certainly not sufficient to wake even a light sleeper.

At last, however, the lock, which was a common one, yielded.

With a snap, the bolt sank into its place.

He drew open the drawer, and placed his hand inside it.

He clutched immediately a bag of gold.

He could tell it was gold by its great weight and the smallness of the coins that it contained.

There were two other bags.

These, also, he appropriated.

For a wonder, Wild was satisfied, and he resolved to retreat, if he possibly could, without making an alarm.

With that view, he did not attempt to search further.

He glided to the door of the room.

As he passed it, he fancied he heard a noise.

But he did not stay to listen.

"Come, Noakes," he said, "follow me quickly and silently."

"Have you succeeded?"

"Yes; I have taken a couple of hundred pounds at least. Come on! Now, then, what do you think of your foolish fears? How easily it has been obtained! It was only to stretch forth my hand and take!"

At this moment a loud noise attracted their attention.

"The farmer has discovered his loss," said Wild, quickly. "We must retreat with all speed!"

He hastened down the rude staircase as he spoke, across the kitchen to the front door, where he paused.

But he heard hasty footsteps behind him, and loud shouts and cries, showing that a general alarm had taken place.

The fire was still burning on the hearth in the kitchen, though only feebly.

"Let us give them something to amuse themselves with before we start," said Wild. "They will be too busy, I'll warrant, to think of pursuing us now!"

While speaking, Jonathan Wild had seized a number of light, inflammable articles that happened to be in the kitchen, and threw them on the fire.

They blazed up immediately, and while still burning, he scattered them about in various directions.

"Now, Noakes," he said, "follow me!"

He darted out of the door, which was already open, just as several persons, with a terrified expression of countenance, came rushing down the staircase.

Their first impulse was to pursue the robbers.

But when they saw how fearfully the place was menaced by fire they changed their determination.

The uproar increased, for the flames spread with a rapidity that was truly incredible.

Everything about the building was of a highly combustible nature, so that the fire, so to speak, found food everywhere it went.

All idea of pursuing the robbers was abandoned, and the terrified inmates set themselves to work to extinguish the flames.

Wild and Noakes ran towards the shed where they had hidden their bundles, and possessing themselves of them, with all speed ran hastily away.

From time to time they glanced back, and saw through the windows of the farm-house the fierce gleam of the flames.

"I told you I would find them employment," Jonathan said, "and I have kept my word. What do you think of to-night's proceedings now?"

"Why, the result has been better than I anticipated."

"Is it not always so? Had I allowed myself on any occasion to be influenced by your advice, what would have been the end? Bah! Noakes, I am disgusted with you. I feel almost inclined to knock you on the head and put an end to your miserable existence at once; it would be quite a charity to do it, only I enjoy your society. You amuse—that's why I permit you to live."

Noakes ground his teeth bitterly.

It was the first time he had heard Wild speak so plainly.

But about the truth of his words he could have no doubt.

He had known all along why it was that Jonathan permitted him to live, and allowed him to speak so freely to him.

"But come on," said Wild—"I don't want to bear any malice now! We have got through all these troubles much better than I expected. We are rich—we have plenty of money; and now I'll put your mind at rest by crossing over to Holland without delay."

CHAPTER DCL.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES AT LAST COME IN SIGHT OF THE SEA.

FINDING themselves in no danger of pursuit, Wild and Noakes went on their way at an easy rate.

At length, however, they paused before a hedge, which separated them from the high-road.

"That's our direction," said Wild, "and if I felt sure that the officers were before us I would keep along it."

"But how shall we obtain that knowledge?"

"We must be perpetually on the look-out. Hark! I fancy I can hear something now! Listen!"

"I can hear nothing."

"Listen, I tell you!"

Both were silent for several minutes, and at length Noakes cried:

"I can hear the tramp of horses' feet—I am sure of it."

"And so am I. We will wait here, and watch them go by."

"Which way are they coming?"

"From the direction I want to take, so that if we start now we shall meet them."

Noakes was by no means willing to do this.

He laid himself down at full length on the grass by the side of the hedge.

The trampling of horses' feet became plainer each moment, and it was evident that horsemen in considerable numbers were approaching.

Time passed, and then, peering through the hedge, Jonathan observed a large troop of police officers.

They were coming along at a gentle rate, and he could hear the murmur of voices in conversation.

Some words he overheard.

"Depend upon it they have gone no further along the road," said one—"they cannot have done so."

"I am inclined to be of the same opinion. They have doubled upon us somewhere, but where I have no idea."

"Nor I. We will find out, though, if it is at all within possibility."

"We will—we will! It was a pity we rode on at such a rapid speed, making so sure they were on the road before us. We ought to have looked out on each side for anything suspicious."

"It's no use grieving about that now."

"Not a bit."

The voices died away.

Wild could hear no more.

The officers gradually passed by, and continued their course along the road.

"Now," said Jonathan Wild, gleefully, "we're safe—quite safe!"

"How do you make that out?" asked Noakes, who was in an agony of fright.

"Easily enough!"

"Explain."

"I will, if you wish it. While the officers are going in that direction, we must be safe if we keep along the highway. Every step we take we shall be going two steps further away from them."

"Yes—yes—I can see. But how if they discover our horses, as probably they will?"

"Why, then they will recommence the pursuit," said Jonathan Wild. "But before then it's very odd to me if I am not at the sea-shore."

"Are you really in earnest about the sea-shore?"

"Certainly I am."

"I can hardly believe it, Mr. Wild, you have talked of it so much!"

"Well, there will not be time to talk of it much longer, for at a moderate calculation, if we keep along this road, we must come within sight of the sea by daylight."

This was indeed most welcome news to Noakes, and he remained silent for some time gloating over it.

At a steady rate they continued to trudge along the high-road, not meeting with any accident or adventure by the way.

Then, after a long pause, Wild spoke.

He pointed straight before him.

"Look, Noakes," he said—"look! There is that long streak of light in advance, close down to the horizon, that shows how close the new day is."

"But the sea—where is that?"

"Just beyond. You will see it presently, when it grows lighter."

Wild's words were shortly after verified.

From a piece of rising ground they obtained, just about sunrise, a magnificent view of the wide expanse of water.

"There you are," said Wild. "Now are you content?"

"I am content—quite content."

"That is well, then."

"Shall you attempt to embark at once?"

"No, no—it will not be safe till night. We must look out for some place where we can remain until darkness comes."

"But why not start now?"

"Because our boat must inevitably be seen; but if we wait till night we shall be able to push off, and we have some time we are half a mile from shore we shall be completely out of sight."

Great as was his impatience to get upon the water, Noakes could not but be conscious that in this respect Wild was right.

"Where are we to stay?" he asked.

"That I know not at present. But come on—the sea is in reality further off than it looks to be, and we have some distance yet to walk. On the shore, however, I have no doubt we shall find some cavity or indentation in the rocks into which we can crawl and remain until night-fall."

"That will suit us well," said Noakes, "and while we are here we can make ourselves familiar with the appearance of the place, and arrange our plan of operations."

"Very true!" said Wild. "Don't flag now—it's a hard walk that we have before us; but it will be best to undertake it. If you are ever so tired, don't stop to rest, for at this hour in the morning there is little likelihood that we shall meet with anyone."

Mr. Noakes was very weary already, but as he could see the ocean he believed they could not have far to go.

He found out his mistake, however, when he had been walking for nearly a couple of hours without ceasing.

The water then seemed as far off as ever.

It was not, in fact, until the sun had gained a considerable altitude that they paused on the beach.

They had been careful to choose a part where there were no habitations visible, and where they believed they should be quite out of sight.

There were some tall cliffs close to the water's edge, and up these, with great difficulty, the tired villains climbed.

Presently they came to a natural fissure in the rock, and into this they crept, and sank down completely footsore and exhausted.

A more lonely spot than this, Wild fancied he had never seen.

Although, however, there was so little fear that they should be seen by any of their pursuers, he determined to take every precaution in his power.

For this reason it was arranged that one should watch while the other slept.

And so the time gradually and gradually wore away.

They watched the sun set far away over the waters, and noted with pleasure the huge black clouds that began to pile themselves up in the sky.

Had they been better acquainted with the tokens of the weather they would certainly have postponed their intended voyage.

An old sailor, looking up at the aspect of the sky, could have prophesied with certainty that the night would be a rough one.

Of this neither Wild nor Noakes for a moment thought.

All they were aware of amounted to the fact that if the night was dark there would be less likelihood they should be seen by anyone.

After some deliberation, it had been agreed upon between them that they would seize upon some small vessel lying at anchor or drawn up upon the beach, and, no one on board it but themselves, take their course across the German Ocean.

It seemed a perilous venture for them.

But Jonathan relied greatly on his own powers.

In former times he had made many and many a voyage to Holland, and to a certain extent was familiar with the method of managing a small craft.

He knew how to set the sails, and was aware of the direction he wished to take.

It was not as though he had any particular port to gain.

Anywhere on the coast of Holland or Germany would suit his purpose.

He imagined that to keep the boat's head turned in the required direction would be an easy enough matter.

The greatest difficulty he saw as yet was getting possession of a boat.

No such article could be seen anywhere along the coast from his elevated situation on the cliff, and how far he might have to go before he found what he required was hard to say.

So soon as ever it was dusk they began to descend.

"We will keep along the shore to the right," said Wild. "Before long we must perceive a boat—there are always plenty everywhere on the beach."

They found it very rough, hard, disagreeable walking over the loose shingle.

But this was a trifle they wholly disregarded in the strong desire they felt to achieve their purpose.

CHAPTER CCLII.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES TAKE VIOLENT POSSESSION OF A BOAT.

HALF an hour afterwards, Jonathan Wild cried:

"Stop—look there!"

Mr. Noakes strained his eyes, and endeavoured to pierce the darkness.

"I can see nothing!" he said. "What is it?"

"Look a little way off the land—can you see that boat there?"

"I can see a mass of something black upon the water."

"Then that's a boat; I can see it plainly."



[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES AT SEA IN THE FISHING BOAT.]

"I will take your word for it, Mr. Wild. Do you think that will suit us?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"And how shall we obtain it?"

"By main force if necessary. But come, don't flag now, our walk will soon be over."

"I am glad to hear it, for I am wearied to death."

"I am tired, too. Curse those horses; it would have made all the difference had they brought us a few miles further!"

"Perhaps it is all for the best, Mr. Wild."

"Perhaps so; at any rate, we shall have to make ourselves content as best we can."

"I can see the boat now."

"Can you?"

"Yes. It seems a small one."

"Yes; but yet it's plenty large enough to carry both of us."

No. 140.—BLUESKIN.

"But is it large enough to cross the ocean?"

"Oh, plenty—plenty! I will warrant that it does the voyage more safely and with greater speed than a larger vessel."

"That is good news indeed; it looks at last as though fortune meant to favour us."

"It does. I have no doubt now we shall succeed."

"Are you sorry to leave England behind you?"

"No, glad—heartily glad."

"I hope nothing will occur to interfere with our intention."

"Oh! don't be afraid—it's all right, depend upon it."

"I think we may safely reckon upon having baffled our pursuers."

"Yes, it will be strange indeed if we are troubled with them again before we start."

They continued walking on some time in silence.

The vessel which Jonathan Wild's keen eye had de-

ected was a small one, looking not unlike a fishing smack.

It was furnished with a rude sail.

"There it is," said Wild, at length. "Now, all we have to do is to take possession of it."

"But how are we to manage that?"

"Easily enough."

"But the boat is so far out at sea."

"No, only a few yards. It appears so because it is now high tide—at least, the water is going down now, I think."

"And is it not deep?"

"No, not at all. We should get wet up to our knees perhaps in wading through, but nothing worse than that. Come on!"

Having satisfied himself by a stealthy glance that there was no one at hand to observe their movements, Jonathan Wild walked into the water.

He was followed by Mr. Noakes, who could not help feeling some degree of alarm.

As Jonathan had told him, however, the water was very shallow.

But it gradually increased in depth as they proceeded.

"Don't make such a splashing as that," said Wild, in a low voice; "be as quiet as you can!"

"What for? who can hear us?"

"There may be some one in the boat."

"Oh ah! yes, so there may—I didn't think of that."

"Then you ought."

"But, Mr. Wild."

"What?"

"If there is some one in the boat?"

"Well?"

"How should you manage then?"

"Manage? why, easily enough. You will soon see how I shall overcome any little difficulty of that sort."

While speaking, Jonathan Wild thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a pistol.

He examined it carefully to ascertain whether the priming had been wetted.

But finding all was right, he continued his course with confidence.

If there was anyone on board the boat, they were evidently unaware of their approach.

Not the least notice was taken, and at length the two villains paused close to it.

"Now then," said Wild, "we've got it all to ourselves. Fling in your bundle and then climb in afterwards."

Wild tossed his own bundle into the boat as he spoke.

The jingling noise produced awoke a man who had been left in charge of the boat.

"Hallo!" he said, in a gruff voice. "What the devil's that?"

"In with your bundle," said Wild—"be quick, and have your sword ready in case you should require it."

"Thieves! pirates!" cried the man, with a shout of astonishment, as he sprang up in the boat. "There—stand off, will you, or it will be the worse for you!"

Jonathan Wild coolly began to climb into the boat.

"Stand off, I tell you!" said the man. "Oh! you won't? then take that!"

With great suddenness he picked up an oar and raised it in the air with the intention of striking his assailants a heavy blow.

"Down with him, Noakes!" said Wild. "Slash him with your sword! I don't want to fire my pistol if I can help it, because it will raise an alarm!"

Noakes made a sudden cut at the man in the boat with his sword.

But the blow was dexterously avoided.

The next moment the oar descended with full force, and Noakes narrowly escaped receiving it upon his head.

There was now no time for hesitation.

Before the man could recover the oar again, Jonathan had raised his pistol and pulled the trigger.

There was a flash, and a report that sounded very loud upon the silent water.

It mingled with the death-scream of the man, who, staggering back, fell head-foremost into the sea.

"He is settled," said Wild, coolly. "Now, then, in with you! It's odd to me now if we are not pursued."

This was enough to recall all Mr. Noakes's energies.

But not without some difficulty he climbed into the boat after his companion, almost capsizing it as he did so.

"Pull up the anchor," cried Wild, as he busied himself with the sail, "and then we will be off."

But Noakes knew nothing about nautical matters, and Wild uttered a string of curses at his ignorance.

With the speed of desperation he pulled up the anchor, for he could see lights moving about upon the shore.

The discharge of the pistol had evidently raised an alarm, as he feared it would.

The moment the anchor was released the boat sped over the waves.

Both wind and tide were in their favour, and Wild returned to the sail again.

He fixed it in a proper position, and then they scudded over the waves at a speed that was really terrifying.

"Now we're right," said Wild, with a sigh of satisfaction, as he sank down in the bow of the boat. "Noakes, you villain, what do you think of matters now?"

"They certainly bear a brighter aspect than they did," was the reply. "I scarcely believe, however, that we have really set sail from English shores."

"You will realise it after awhile," said Wild. "And now, if the police do not set off in pursuit of us, all will be well."

"Do you think there is any fear of that, Mr. Wild?" asked Noakes, already terrified.

"Yes, it is quite possible; however, there is one comfort—we have got the start, and it will take them some time to overtake us."

Mr. Noakes did not speak, but sank down in the boat quite exhausted, and feeling not half so content and secure as he did a few minutes previously.

He fixed his eyes upon the coast, which was fast becoming lost to sight in the darkness.

He could see nothing alarming, however, and after a time his courage rose again.

As they got farther and farther out to sea the violence of the wind much increased, consequently the speed of the little vessel was much accelerated.

The mast bent forward through the strain, and every now and then the prow of the boat would be almost under water.

"I won't take the sail down yet," Wild said—"I will risk it a little while longer. There are few who would venture to fly before the wind at this pace, but it is a capital little boat, and will carry us bravely."

Mr. Noakes said nothing, for he began to feel very uncomfortable indeed.

He could not tell at first what it was that ailed him.

"Why, Noakes," said his companion, suddenly, "what ails you? Are you frightened?"

"No—no, Mr. Wild."

"What then?"

"I—I—"

"What?"

"I feel very ill."

"Bah! I know what's the matter with you—you are sea-sick, that's all. You'll soon get over it, though I should scarcely have thought you'd been on the water long enough to feel any effects at present."

CHAPTER DCCLII.

THE POSITION OF JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES IN THE LITTLE BOAT IS ANYTHING BUT PLEASANT.

MR. NOAKES GROANED.

"Are you so very bad?"

"I am, Mr. Wild—I am. I feel as though I should die."

"I suppose you will some day, but not just at present, I rather think."

"Oh! I don't know. I get worse every moment. I never felt like this in all my life before."

"What an unreasonable fellow you are," said Wild. "Now you have left England behind you, you are not satisfied."

"I am—I am—only I can't help this dreadful sickness."

Mr. Noakes laid himself down in the boat, and really looked very bad indeed.

It has often been said that as nothing is like sea-sickness but death, so death can be the only thing that is like sea-sickness.

Mr. Noakes had never been on the ocean before.

As for Jonathan, he was a tolerable sailor, and laughed at the other's indisposition.

"Get up," he cried, at length, saluting Noakes with a heavy kick—"get up, d—n you! Do you think I am going to attend to the boat all myself? Will you lie groaning there, doing nothing?"

"Don't kick me, Mr. Wild."

"But I shall if you don't get up!"

"I can't get up."

"Then take that and that!"

Jonathan had some very heavy boots on, and so Noakes felt the pain of the kicks from them very severely.

With much difficulty he managed to raise himself partially up.

It seemed as though all the strength had deserted his body.

His face was as white as death.

"There," said Wild, "I am the doctor you require—you look better already! Now, then, just sit there and keep a look-out, will you?"

It was more than Mr. Noakes could accomplish.

He sat for a time where Wild had directed him, and then suddenly slipped down, as though half lifeless.

Jonathan's attention just then was directed to the rear.

Looking back over the angry, foaming waters, he fancied he could perceive in the distance the outline of some large vessel, manned by many rowers, who were making all speed towards him.

He strained his eyes in a vain endeavour to ascertain whether this was really the case, or whether his fancy had deceived him.

So intently was he occupied in this that he knew nothing about his companion having again sunk to the bottom of the boat.

He believed him to be keeping a look-out ahead.

Wild was steering; that is to say, he was using the rudder in such a manner as to keep the vessel all the time before the wind.

Whiter and whiter grew the waves, and they rose up and down in large tumultuous billows.

The wind came shrieking and roaring over the water.

But Jonathan scarcely heeded it.

All his senses were bent up in watching the pursuing boat.

Yes, it was a boat, and it was pursuing him.

Reluctantly he had been forced to the conclusion that his fancy had not deceived him—that it was really his enemies, straining every nerve to overtake him.

The solitary mast creaked and groaned beneath the immense pressure of the wind, and had not the sail been composed of very strong material it must have been split to ribbons long since.

No one, without in similar circumstances of desperation, would have run the risk of carrying a sail in such an angry sea.

On all sides there were indications that this was but the slight forerunner of a storm, only the presage of something more terrible and dangerous to come.

Of all this Noakes was also unconscious.

He lay on his back in the boat, with his eyes closed, heartily wishing that his miserable existence was at an end.

He was almost ready to regret having felt so much anxiety to dare the dangers of the deep, and certainly just then, had he been allowed his choice, he would have preferred being on the shore.

Denser and denser grew the air, until all objects became lost to view—until it was no longer possible to see more than a few yards from the boat.

Whether the pursuing boat had given up the chase, and, viewing the aspect of the weather, thought it advisable to return, or whether they were then continuing their strenuous efforts, Jonathan could not possibly tell.

His own terrors made him picture the latter as being the more likely state of affairs.

At length, finding that it was perfectly useless to continue at his present post, Jonathan quitted it, having made the rudder secure by a rope.

Then he perceived not only the situation of his comrade, but also that the little boat was continually shipping heavy seas.

Already it was nearly a third part full of water, and the quantity momentarily increased.

"Get up, Noakes!" he roared, making his voice heard above the howling of the wind—"get up, curse you! Or will you lie there and let us be drowned?"

Mr. Noakes neither stirred nor spoke.

Jonathan saw that he was helpless and incapable, and that it would be useless to depend upon him in any way.

The task of baling out the water was a terrible one to undertake by himself.

If Mr. Noakes had assisted him the vessel might quickly have been lightened.

There was nothing else, either, by which he could bale out the water, except his hat, and this answered the purpose very insufficiently.

Still, he worked with a will—worked unceasingly, indeed, until at length he was compelled to give up from sheer exhaustion.

Then he found that if he had not lowered the water he had prevented it from increasing.

There was now about the same quantity in as at first.

If he rested longer, however, the boat would get half full.

Mr. Noakes rolled about occasionally, and groaned.

But these were the only signs of life that he exhibited.

Muttering the most awful curses upon himself and everybody and everything else in the world, Jonathan again renewed his labours.

But now the storm was beginning in good earnest.

There came one tremendous gust of wind, the like of which Jonathan Wild had never before felt.

It seemed as though it would force the boat head-foremost into the ocean.

Doubtless it would have overturned it had not the mast given way.

There was a tremendous crash, a splitting noise, and then, with a rush, the broken sail and everything connected with it fell over the side.

Some of the ropes still held, and this weight being all on one side of the boat, almost brought it on its beam-ends.

Quickened by terror at his dangerous position, Jonathan instantly took his knife out of his pocket, and, with a few smart strokes, severed all the ropes.

The mast and sail released, then floated far away over the waters, becoming lost to sight in a second.

The boat righted itself with great suddenness, and then went over the waters at a speed and in a manner that was frightful to behold.

The rudder was broken, and so the little bark was hurried before the gale just as some log of wood might have been, now going in one direction, now in another.

All reckoning was lost.

In the intense darkness, Jonathan had no idea whether he was persevering in the right course or not.

Yet as he seemed to have flown before the wind all the time, he imagined he could not be far out.

The task of baling out the water grew more and more difficult.

By his greatest exertions, he could scarcely prevent it from rising.

And then, at that truly awful time, surely anyone but Jonathan Wild would have resigned himself to that fate which seemed inevitable.

But, with that dogged spirit of resistance and perseverance against all obstacles which formed such a characteristic of his nature, he continued to struggle hard against his destiny.

He may have derived some consolation from the recollection of an old proverb; but certain it is, from whatever cause it might be, Jonathan did not believe that his life was actually in much danger.

During the whole of the night the wind continued to blow as before, and the waves to roll literally mountains high.

The perspiration streamed from every pore in Wild's body as he continued to work incessantly.

Slowly and slowly the hours dragged by, and he began to look anxiously for some signs of the approach of morning.

All around continued to be as dark as before.

In no direction could he perceive a single gleam of light.

CHAPTER DCLIII.

JONATHAN WILD THINKS THE PROSPECT OF HIS GAINING THE SHORE RATHER DOUBTFUL.

ALL this while Mr. Noakes had remained with the greater part of his body immersed in the water.

Now, however, the death-like feeling which he had experienced so intensely began to wear away.

By slow degrees—for his strength was much exhausted—he dragged himself out of his uncomfortable posture.

In a huddled-up heap, he sat on one of the seats, looking about him with such a woe-begone air as provoked a roar of laughter from his companion.

"Why, Noakes," he said, "how dismal you look! One would think that nothing was further from your desires than to leave England!"

"It is well for you to jest and jeer at me," replied Noakes; "I wish, however, that you felt as I do!"

"Then I'm d—d if it would not be all up with us both, for if I had been as helpless as you have we should have been at the bottom long since!"

"And a good job too!" moaned Noakes.

"What's that?"

"I say it would be nothing to regret. What in the world is the use of living such a miserable existence as this is? No death could be equal to it!"

"Indeed! Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it!"

"And you would prefer to give up quietly and go out of existence?"

"Yes, I would."

"Then I will take you at your word!" said Wild. "Come on—I'll pitch you overboard at once, and put you out of your misery! You know I was always ready to do you any little favour, Noakes, and you would be obliging me as well, for, lightened of your weight, the boat would go along ever so much better!"

In spite of what he had just said, Mr. Noakes seemed to cling with his whole body tighter to the seat, and he clutched the edges of the boat convulsively.

"Now, then," said Wild, advancing towards him, "are you ready? If so, say the word!"

"No, no—not yet, Mr. Wild!"

"Why not yet? I thought you said you were quite ready?"

"I thought I was, but now——"

Wild interrupted him by laughing hideously.

"You are coming to your senses now, I perceive; but, mark my words, if you continue to sit there idly as you have done, I will, so surely as you now live, throw you overboard, for I will not perform all the labour myself!"

"I am strengthless!" said Noakes.

"No matter; you have heard what I have said, and, never fear, I shall be quite as good as my word! Without you begin to work at once, over you go!"

Noakes knew that this was no idle threat, and it may be imagined that an entire revulsion of his feelings had taken place, for now he set himself to work at baling out the water with some degree of vigour.

The exercise seemed to improve him.

He was evidently getting a little the better of his sickness.

By the exertions of both, the water was, after a length of time, considerably diminished.

Suddenly Wild stopped.

"What is it?" asked Noakes, feebly. "Why do you stay?"

"For nothing—to rest only. I can now see what I have been looking for a length of time."

"And what is that?"

"The dawn. Look over there, and you will see a little lightness in the sky. It will soon be daylight now, and then this will not seem half so disagreeable as it does now."

In the east there was certainly a little light to be seen.

But the storm showed no signs of abatement.

The wind still blew with terrific force.

And the waves continued to roll in a manner such as Wild had never witnessed before.

But the morning was coming, and with it he thought surely would come a cessation of the violence of the tempest.

It was a thousand wonders that so small a vessel should be able to withstand the violence of such a gale.

But it was an excellent boat, and rode upon the waters when perhaps many a larger one would have foundered.

When the grey, cold light of early dawn diffused itself entirely over the surface of the waters, Jonathan beheld nothing that was cheering or encouraging.

The sky was covered with huge masses of clouds, and, when they rose up to the summit of a wave and he looked around him, he could see nothing but the boisterous ocean on all sides.

Miserable as the prospect was, yet he had the philosophy to draw some consolation from it.

"You may think this storm a very bad thing, Noakes, but I don't."

"Why not?"

"Because, had it been calmer weather, we should certainly have been overtaken by those who commenced a pursuit after us. They would have made every exertion—have signalled different vessels, and in the end we must have been captured."

"And is there no one in sight now?"

"No one. When we rise again on the summit of this wave, look all around you, and you will find that there is not a single soul in sight. This was why I was wishing for morning to come, in order that I might satisfy myself that we were free from the danger of pursuit. Now I feel better, and am conscious that all will turn out well."

His confident manner of speaking produced a considerable effect upon Mr. Noakes, although he was in such a miserable condition of body and mind.

"Oh, if this voyage was but over!" he said—"if I could but once more put my foot upon dry land!"

"You would be glad, doubtless," said Wild, "and so should I, I confess, for I feel that I want rest."

"How long do you think the journey will take us?" was Noakes's next question.

"That's a question impossible to answer."

"Why so?"

"At present I cannot tell how far the wind and waves may have carried us out of our course. We may not, for aught I can say at the present moment, be going in the direction of the land at all."

"Do you mean that we are being carried out to the open sea?"

"Yes."

"Then," said Noakes, emphatically, "we are lost, for we have no sail!"

"I don't agree with you. I don't believe we are lost. Let us wait. The violence of this storm must abate; and yet, if it gets no worse than it has been, I should not care, because we shall be all the safer from pursuit."

It will be seen, from this conversation, that Wild experienced but little terror in consequence of his situation.

And yet there were many bold-hearted sailors who would have shrunk back at the very idea of encountering such a fearful danger.

And so, without any accident of importance occurring to diversify it, the whole of that day passed by.

It is possible that the storm was not so terrible as it had been, yet the wind blew with tremendous force.

Bravely did the little boat hold upon her course.

There were times when even Jonathan Wild thought that she would sink to the bottom.

A heavy wave would sometimes break and nearly fill her with water.

Then he would go himself actively to work, and in the space of a short time the vessel would be lightened.

Yet when a wave broke in the manner we have described, if it had been followed immediately by another, nothing could have saved them.

The boat must have been swamped.

This was what Jonathan was most in dread of.

But the day passed, and that accident did not happen.

During this day and night they had neither slept nor partaken of food.

Therefore both were terribly exhausted.

Jonathan, too, was tired out by his terrific labour, the extent of which can scarcely be imagined from a bare description of it.

But Jonathan's courage began to fail him as night came on.

He watched misgivingly the darkening of the sky, and he fancied, as the obscurity grew greater and greater, so did the storm become more violent.

He could do nothing more than he had done, however.

But whether during the night that was just beginning he should be able to keep up the exertion he had already made was a doubtful point.

That Mr. Noakes was suffering severely—that, indeed, he was very ill—there could be no doubt.

But when he reflected that they had been twenty-four hours upon the water, scudding forward with unabated velocity, he began to think that it was worth while to make a hard struggle, as he imagined the distance they had to go was almost accomplished.

All the time he wished for morning to come, being fully impressed with the belief that, if they survived that night, the earliest rays of morning would show them land in the distance.

CHAPTER DCLIV.

A TERRIBLE SCENE TAKES PLACE ON BOARD THE LITTLE BOAT.

This expectation was not realised.

Tediously—most tediously—did the night drag itself away.

And when once more the daylight shone upon the ocean, they were unable to perceive the slightest indications of land.

"Look—look!" Noakes had said. "You can see better than I can, Mr. Wild. I would sooner trust to your judgment than my own. Tell me whether you can see anything of the shore!"

Then Jonathan, not without manifest danger to himself, stood up in the boat just as it was balanced on the crest of an enormous wave.

He had one momentary glimpse around him.

But, as on the preceding morning, nothing but the ocean itself met his view.

But they had this consolation remaining to them—the wind had now decreased to a moderate breeze, and, though the waves were very rough—alarmingly so for a boat in the condition theirs was—yet, by comparison, the water seemed nearly smooth.

Little exertion was now required to keep out the water.

They had to apply themselves to this task occasionally, but it by no means required the incessant toil it did at first.

Jonathan was now completely overcome.

He could do nothing towards directing the course of the vessel, nor could he in any way accelerate its speed.

Therefore it was with a somewhat dejected air that he sat himself down at one end of the boat, and left the wind and the waves to carry him where they chose.

He felt giddy and faint for want of food, and the salt water had splashed upon his face, and the atmosphere he had breathed was so impregnated with saline particles that he suffered from an almost ungovernable thirst.

His tongue and lips were parched and swollen.

But there was not a drop of water to be had wherewith he could moisten them.

He looked longingly upon the clear blue waves, that were so transparent he fancied he could see down for miles and miles.

He was aware that one draught of the salt water, so far from assuaging his sufferings, would only increase them a thousand times.

Mr. Noakes was thirsty too, and, but for Jonathan Wild's vigorous interposition, would certainly have drunk deeply of the sea water.

But Jonathan pictured to him the consequences that must infallibly result from such a course.

This was partly from a consideration of his own safety.

He had been told how men, drinking of salt water, had been driven mad, and how in that condition they had made attacks upon the remainder of the crew.

It would be, he felt, no pleasant thing for a sudden access of madness to come over Noakes.

He somehow seemed to feel the first thing his companion would do would be to attack him, and if so, in his own weak state, he would stand but little chance against a madman.

Scarcely would it have been possible to find in the

whole of the wide world two more miserable, wretched beings than were Wild and Noakes that day.

Every hour seemed to increase their sufferings.

They were cold, wet, weary, hungry, thirsty, and with scarcely a ray of hope to cheer them on.

And when at length the sun went down without their being able even at the last moment to see anything of the wished-for land, their courage failed them altogether, and both resigned themselves to despair.

In a sleepy, half-conscious condition, the night was passed away.

Neither spoke.

But the minds of both were filled with dark and evil thoughts.

Each hour only served to increase the pangs of hunger.

Every moment they threatened to become unendurable.

When starting upon their voyage, it will be recollected that they altogether forgot it would be necessary to provide themselves with food and drink.

They had searched carefully the boat in every part, thinking perhaps some fragments might have been left on board.

But their search was unrewarded.

They found nothing.

When again daylight came, it showed them gazing upon each other with hungry-looking, bloodshot eyes.

They looked, in fact, more like wild beasts than human beings, for there was an air of ferociousness visible that could scarcely be reconciled with humanity.

As on the previous morning, Noakes was the first to break the silence.

"Can you see anything?" he said, hoarsely, his parched lips cracked and bleeding—"can you see anything of the shore?"

Slowly, Jonathan endeavoured to raise himself up, and then was surprised to find how soon he had grown weak.

He had scarcely more strength in his limbs than a child.

His brain spun round and round, and a kind of mist floated before his eyes.

Quite a minute elapsed before he overcame these disagreeable sensations.

Then, standing up with difficulty in the boat, he looked across the water.

But no—nothing whatever met his view.

As before, the ocean looked like a desert.

There was not a single thing to break the monotony of its glistening surface.

He sank back dejectedly into his seat.

"We must have patience, Noakes," he said—"as much patience as we can."

"Are you sure there is no land?"

"Quite certain. There are no signs of it. If the shore was within a distance of several miles of this place, I could not fail to note it. It looks to me as though we had been carried away far into the ocean."

"Then how long will this voyage last?"

"What an absurd question for you to put! How could anyone possibly reply to it?"

"Is it to end by a slow, miserable, lingering death of starvation?"

"It looks like it."

Noakes groaned.

"Well," he said, "if death came suddenly upon me and took me before I was aware of it, it would indeed be a happy release from this life."

Jonathan said no more, but fixed his eyes intently upon his companion.

It is wonderful what a change hunger will effect in human beings.

It makes the most gentle and inoffensive ferocious to a degree.

What, then, must be its effects upon those who are naturally feral?

A horrible idea was developing itself at the same time in the minds of both these men.

Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes both felt that their hunger must be appeased.

One way, and one way only, presented itself by which this might be done—a most horrible—most revolting way.

And yet, when the idea first entered their minds, it kept firm possession of them and grew continually in strength.

That way of satisfying their hunger was cannibalism. The most repugnant thing that can be by any possibility imagined.

Will it be believed that Jonathan Wild thought with a sigh of regret of the man they had thrown overboard?

He wished they had not been so hasty in parting with him.

Certain it is that if at that moment the dead body had been in the boat he would have made a voracious attack upon it.

But that man was down at the bottom of the sea miles and miles away, so it was useless to think about him.

But, with all the brutality and unscrupulousness of his nature, Jonathan Wild could not make up his mind to rush across the boat and by a sudden blow put an end to his companion's life.

Noakes, on the other hand, watched every movement that Jonathan Wild made most stealthily.

His courage was increasing—a courage that was born of starvation and despair; and as they had all along been both thinking at the same time of the same thing, so, strangely enough, without being aware of it, both made up their minds at the same instant for an attack.

More like tigers than human beings, both rose up in the boat.

Something in the manner of each furnished a clue to their thoughts.

Jonathan knew instantly that Noakes intended to make an attack upon him, and Noakes acquired the same knowledge.

It would, then, be a desperate struggle for the mastery. A struggle of life and death.

A struggle as to which should be the survivor left in the boat to tell the horrible fate of the other.

Cautiously, like tigers preparing for a spring, they drew closer and closer together, each striving to make a sudden bound upon his adversary and take him at unawares.

This lasted for several minutes.

Then, rendered furious by the gnawing of their hunger, they darted forward and grappled each other furiously.

CHAPTER DCLV.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES MAKE AN APPALLING AND DISHEARTENING DISCOVERY.

THE very commencement of the struggle almost put an end to the lives of both of them.

The sudden movement caused the frail vessel to lurch over to one side.

Wild and Noakes both lost their footing.

They were injured severely by their fall, and some time elapsed before either attempted to rise.

Both were extremely weak—weak to the last degree.

But as their horrible purpose strengthened and strengthened, so did they by slow degrees gain their feet.

Once more they were locked in a deadly embrace, when Jonathan, in a hoarse, hissing, almost inaudible voice, cried:

"Hold—hold—there is no need for this! Land—land—I can see land!"

These words at once brought about a complete change in Mr. Noakes's feelings.

He let go his hold instantly, and sat down.

Then, covering his face with his hands, wept bitterly.

Wild himself was almost overcome by the abruptness with which this discovery had been made.

He could scarcely maintain his feet, but he tried hard to do so.

His heart beat violently.

All his pulses throbbled, and his eyes grew dim with weakness and excitement.

Then he placed his trembling hands over his eyes, so as to shade them from the light.

Then, as the boat mounted upon a wave, he took another look before him.

Yes, he had made no mistake.

There was the land—yes, certainly, the land.

He could see green fields.

He could see waving trees covered with foliage, and little specks upon the coast that he fancied were habitations.

He could not wait to see any more, but fell down completely exhausted.

"Is it true?" said Noakes, huskily—"is it true? or did your fancy mislead you?"

"No, I was right."

"And you can see the land?"

"Yes, certainly—it is there."

Jonathan pointed.

"And how far are we from it?"

"A very short distance indeed. At the rate we are now going at, we shall soon touch the coast."

"Not a moment too soon, though," said Noakes—"not a moment too soon! We have been so long performing our journey that I can scarcely bring myself to believe now that it is at an end."

"Stand up in the boat, then, and look—one glance will satisfy you. Stand up—it will be worth your while."

After several ineffectual attempts, Mr. Noakes struggled to his feet.

Then a wild cry thrilled from his lips.

He caught a glimpse of the trees—of the land, and he thought never before had the earth looked so beautiful as then.

The cry of exultation was, however, suddenly cut short.

The boat sank down again into the trough of the sea, and the sudden movement taking Noakes unawares, he fell heavily.

But for a few bruises more or less he cared little now—he was oblivious of everything now that the land was in sight, and that there was a reasonable prospect of gaining it in a short time.

The wind continued to blow steadily towards the coast.

There was no doubt of it, every rolling wave took them several yards nearer.

Then, as they sat in the boat and looked about them, they were able to catch occasional glimpses of the shore, and these grew longer and longer.

"What place do you think it can be?" asked Noakes, presently. "Do you recognise any features in the landscape?"

"No, not yet—do you?"

"No,—my eyes are so dim, and weak, and watery, that, beyond the fact that I can see something that looks like land, I can behold nothing."

"My eyes are the same," Noakes. "It is from want of food, and sleep, and drink. We could not have existed much longer without either."

A meaning glance passed between them.

But nothing was said.

Jonathan rubbed his eyes continually, in the hope of improving his vision.

He wiped them with the sleeve of his coat.

He pressed his eyeballs with his fingers, and then, removing them, raised his eyelids suddenly.

But all in vain.

He beheld everything through a mist.

"It is strange," he said; "the place bears no resemblance to the coast of Holland, and that's where I thought we had reached. It seems very strange!"

"What seems strange?" asked Noakes, surprised at his companion's manner.

"I don't know. Of course it is impossible—quite impossible! Oh yes, now I think of it, it must be impossible—totally impossible, and yet—"

"Yet what?"

"The shore I can see there looks more like England than any other place that I can call to mind."

"England?" said Noakes, with a shriek, and almost starting to his feet while he spoke.

"Yes, England."

"But it is impossible!" he cried, in the same anxious, shrieking tones.

"I know that—I say it is impossible. Here we have been driving all these days and nights before a constant wind, and going in one direction, so it is not possible that that can be England."

"No, certainly not! What a ridiculous idea it was to enter your mind!"

"Very ridiculous," said Wild. "I won't look again till I am nearer."

He turned his back to the land sullenly, and a pause of several moments' duration ensued.

Then Noakes, as he strove to clear his eyes and satisfy

himself by a glance as to the correctness or incorrectness of his companion's notion, said, at length:

"I can't see, Mr. Wild—my eyes are so very, very dim. You look again—we are much nearer now. Tell me what you think."

It was a long and earnest gaze that Wild bestowed upon the shore this time, and when he turned his face towards his companion's it wore a strange expression.

"If—if—" he said, stammeringly and doubtfully.

"If what, Mr. Wild?" asked Noakes, imploring and impatient.

"If, as I said before, I did not know that it was a total impossibility, I should say that it was England I can see."

"But you must be mistaken, Mr. Wild."

"I am mistaken; it may be France or some place with which I am unacquainted, and that bears a certain degree of resemblance to England."

"Yes—yes," said Noakes, eagerly grasping at this idea,—"that must be it—that must be it!"

Again there was a silence, during which the boat continued to make the same steady progress.

Closer and closer to the shore they went, and even Jonathan's half-observed vision enabled him to perceive that the features of the scenery were eminently English.

It is well known that the shores of no other land present a similar aspect.

The coast of the continent was tolerably well known to Jonathan Wild, and so was the coast of his native land.

And when he perceived not only the hedges and the fields, but the little white cottages on the beach, he knew not what to think.

Still the boat drove onward.

Had he been really sure that in some mysterious manner the boat had doubled upon her course, and that it was indeed the English coast he saw, he could not have arrested the progress of the boat in the least.

He could not have changed its direction, no, not if a large body of police officers had been waiting his arrival and expressly looking for him.

Under these circumstances, then, it was best to indulge in the belief that they were deceived by some accidental resemblance.

After all the trouble and difficulty they had gone through, it would indeed be disheartening in the extreme to find that it had all gone for nothing—that they had achieved no good whatever, and only reduced their strength to such a degree that they would scarcely be able to cope with a single adversary.

And still the boat drove on and on, until the shore could be distinctly seen, and every object that was upon it.

And the closer he came, and the more he saw, the more Wild became convinced that he had been driven back to the place from which he started.

He could see the tall cliffs rising out of the water.

And yes, surely that one standing higher than the rest was where himself and his companion had found temporary shelter while waiting for night to come.

Those were the little cottages that were on the beach. Yes, they were certainly driven back almost to the very spot from which they had set out.

CHAPTER DCLVI.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES MEET WITH A SURPRISE. Yes, Jonathan Wild was not deceived.

There could be no mistake or doubt whatever about the fact that the little boat, as though instinct with life, was making its way back to what might be termed its home.

It actually looked like the interposition of fate.

How strange that these two men should be absent for so long, should go through so many perils and dangers, and at last suddenly discover they had only reached the point from which they had set out!

It was very easy indeed for such a thing as this to happen, and for both the inmates of the boat to be unaware and unsuspecting of it.

The wind, which they thought was so steady and blew so continuously from one point, had in reality shifted about several times.

But, of course, the boat on each occasion had gone before it, so that they had fallen into the error of supposing they were taking their right course all the time.

Not, however, that they could have avoided it had they been aware of it.

From the first they were utterly powerless.

They could not stretch forth their hands to arrest their progress in any way.

Deprived of a sail and of all means of propelling the vessel, they could do nothing more than go just wherever the winds and waves might carry them.

In its strange erratic course the little boat had described almost a circle.

It had started from the shore in a north-easterly direction, and returned from the south-east.

As long as ever he could, Jonathan strove resolutely to disbelieve that he had been so exceedingly unfortunate.

But eventually there was no room left for doubt.

And then the curses that broke from his lips were truly awful.

Mr. Noakes exclaimed:

"It is all up with us now—the game is over—fate is against us; it is useless to strive more!"

In his weak state of body, Jonathan Wild almost thought the same.

Yet his indomitable spirit was far from crushed.

"If it should be England," he said, at last, supposing there to be a doubt upon the point, when in reality he knew there was not—"if it should be England, we must take care to land unseen, and to creep away somewhere, and," he added, as a fresh gleam of hope shot across his mind, "very likely our purpose will be as well achieved as if we had actually reached Holland."

"How so?"

"Why, don't our pursuers know that we set out for sea in that frail little vessel? Then there would be that frightful tempest, and would they not come to the conclusion that we had gone down in it and perished?"

"They would, perhaps."

"I am sure they would, and when they saw us they would scarcely credit the evidence of their own senses—they would think they were deceived by some chance or accidental resemblance. I am confident a long time would elapse before they guessed the truth."

There was something rather cheering in this prospect, but not much.

Yet it served to keep Jonathan Wild in a more confident frame of mind than might have been expected under the circumstances.

As the boat drew nearer to the shore its speed very much diminished.

The water was much smother, and the wind had almost entirely gone down.

It was by the action of the tide only that they were drifted towards the beach.

To Jonathan's joy, no human beings could be seen.

The cottages they had first noticed were at some distance from the point at which they might be expected to land.

Nothing but the rugged, rocky cliffs could be seen, and Jonathan hastened to make his companion aware of this fact.

"Come," he said, "all will be well yet, I am sure of it; no one is here to see us—we shall land without being seen."

"Do you think there is a possibility of it?"

"I do—nay, a certainty, and therefore we will arrange what we shall do as soon as we land, that no time may then be lost in discussion."

"I am willing to leave all to you, Mr. Wild."

"You could scarcely do better. However, when we land we will look along the beach for any little shell-fish that may have been cast up by the tide; a mouthful of food will do for us now—we must not eat too much. Then we will crawl into the cliffs, and wait there until we get stronger. In the cliffs I know there will be thousands and thousands of birds' eggs. Upon these we can not only support existence but recover our strength. Then some dark night, watching our opportunity, we will steal forth from our hiding-place, but not until we are strong and well."

"And what shall we do then?" asked Noakes, pointedly.

"I hardly think it worth while to consider the subject now," said Wild; "we are looking far enough into the future, and who can say what may arise that will have

the effect of altering our plans, even slightly as we have formed them?"

Mr. Noakes sighed.

"I wish this life was over," he said. "If our enemies were to make their appearance when we land, I should fall into their hands unresistingly and easily—I should not have the heart to raise a finger in my own behalf."

"More fool you, then!" growled Wild. "But there is no need for you to frighten yourself with any thought of that kind—the coast is quite clear. I am sure no human beings are anywhere near at hand, and there is nothing to prevent us creeping on shore unseen."

Slowly and lazily the boat drifted through the water, Jonathan all the while cursing its tardiness.

But he could not accelerate its speed, and so he remained restlessly watching the distance to the shore gradually diminish.

He leant over the side, looking down through the water, so as to ascertain when it would be shallow enough to allow him to get out of the boat and wade to shore.

But at present it was much too deep.

An hour passed—a whole hour—and yet during that time their progress seemed almost inappreciable.

At the end of that time, however, Jonathan believed that the water was now shallow enough for his purpose.

He explained his intention to Mr. Noakes, and gradually lowered himself over the side.

"We cannot do better," he said. "Summon up your strength, and follow me. Ah! this is glorious! The cold water is indeed refreshing!"

Jonathan was nearly up to his breast in water.

But the coolness was, as he said, refreshing.

All signs of weariness, and hunger, and thirst passed away.

There was such an improvement in his manner that Noakes willingly followed his example.

"The bundles!" cried Wild, as he was about to lower himself over the side—"the bundles! Don't forget them! Give them both to me—I will hold them for a moment!"

In his anxiety, Noakes had forgotten the booty.

But Wild recollected it.

The bundles were handed out, but it was almost more than his strength would allow him to do to hold them another moment.

"Before you get out," said Wild, "we must destroy all trace. In the bottom of the boat you will find a plug—pull it out."

Noakes saw the plug of which his companion spoke, and hastened to remove it.

The water bubbled in at a wonderfully rapid rate.

"Now, then, lower yourself over the side," he exclaimed. "There, that will do. Is it not better?"

Mr. Noakes drew a long breath.

"Much better," he said; "and yet I am almost ready to faint."

"That feeling will soon pass away."

"But how fast the boat is sinking!"

Gradually the little bark settled down in the water.

"It will sink in a few moments at the most," said Wild. "Now come with me. We must wade to the beach. Let us congratulate ourselves upon having managed matters so well."

Heavily and wearily they waded through the water, though at each step they found it grow shallower and shallower.

They reached the firm land at last.

Before them, to their surprise, they saw a narrow road winding between the cliffs.

Before they had time to notice more than this, there came the sound of horses' feet upon their ears.

Stupified and bewildered, Wild and Noakes looked along the road.

Round the corner, at a rapid pace, swept a party of several mounted police officers.

From the lips of one of them came an exclamation.

"As I live," he cried, "there they are—Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes! Now, my lads, seize them and bind them! Hurrah! They are caught at last!"

CHAPTER DCLVII.

JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES ARE MADE PRISONERS BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.

THE police officers were not at all slow in obeying these words of their chief.

They slipped off their horses in an instant, and ran at the top of their speed towards the spot where Wild and Noakes were standing.

So completely stunned and overwhelmed were they by the sudden appearance of the officers, that they were unable to offer any resistance.

Moreover, they had been reduced to the last stage of weakness and exhaustion by their long fast on board the boat.

Mr. Noakes stood perfectly passive, and allowed the officers to seize and bind him securely.

He did not so much as raise a finger in his own defence.

At the same time, several officers rushed at Wild.

Weak and astounded as he was, he nevertheless roused himself at the last moment, and made a feeble, ineffectual attempt to fly.

He failed, however, for his legs gave way beneath him.

He half sank down upon the ground, and the officers threw themselves with great violence upon him.

It was not likely that they would feel at all inclined to treat either him or his companion with any particular amount of gentleness.

On the contrary, they might expect to receive the roughest usage.

There was not one of these officers who did not feel a grudge against Jonathan, and on this occasion he was so completely in their power that they would not fail to avail themselves of the opportunity of gratifying it.

"Bring them along," cried the chief officer—"bring them this way, and let us have a look at them!"

Wild and Noakes were dragged forward.

Then the officer said:

"What miserable objects they are! Where on earth can they have been?"

To this no reply was vouchsafed.

Mr. Noakes trembled like one in an ague fit, and his face turned ghastly white—in fact, the poor wretch was almost fainting from exhaustion, and could scarcely prevent himself from lapsing into unconsciousness.

"Well, now you've caught us, why ain't you satisfied?" growled Wild. "What do you want to haul us about in this way for?"

"You will see all about that!" replied the chief officer.

"You have a nice little journey before you, as I mean taking you to London."

"We shall die on the road."

"Bah!—gammon!"

"I tell you we shall!"

"And I tell you," repeated the officer, "that there is only one means by which you will come to your end, and that's by a rope! And a very good job it will be when that day comes!"

Wild gnashed his teeth.

But hunger and perhaps some other feelings made him humble.

"We have not tasted food for several days and nights," he said. "Had we not been so utterly worn out, you would not have captured us, you may depend upon it!"

"I don't want to trouble myself about any concern of that kind," said the chief officer—"it has nothing to do with me."

"If we die on the high-road while in your charge," retorted Wild, "you will find that it has everything to do with you. If you don't believe my words, look at my companion."

At this moment Mr. Noakes's strength quite gave way.

His eyes closed, and he fell back quite insensible and apparently dead.

"Do you believe me now?" asked Wild. "Now, then, let me know how you intend to act."

The chief officer looked from one to the other of his prisoners, for a single glance would have been sufficient to convince even the most sceptical that for once in his life Jonathan Wild spoke the truth.

That they were absolutely starving—that, in fact, a few

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[JONATHAN WILD AND MR. NOAKES CAPTURED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.]

hours' more deprivation of food would put an end to their existence—was quite certain.

The chief officer knew as well as Wild himself that the consequences would be serious if through any neglect of his he allowed two criminals to perish.

But he was rather in a doubtful frame of mind, so he called his men around him.

They held a low, whispered consultation with each other.

Jonathan strained his ears to the utmost, but could not make out a single word.

"You see," exclaimed the chief officer, "that while I shall get into a fix if they die on the road, yet it will be much against my inclination to give them anything to eat."

"And mine," said another officer.

"They are certainly in a very weak state now, and we must take care to keep them so," added a third.

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"Right," said the chief officer. "They are no ordinary offenders. When once they regain their strength, we should have no end of trouble with them. Perhaps they would slip through our fingers altogether, and we should be overwhelmed with ridicule and disgrace."

"But," chimed in another, "it is a long journey from here to London, and it will not be possible to perform it without various stoppages on the road. They must be allowed something to eat and drink."

"That's true."

"And then, think of ourselves," said this officer, who happened to be blessed with an excellent appetite. "We must pause now and then for something to eat. A great many hours have elapsed since we had a meal last, and I am sure I feel as though I wanted another."

"Well, the question is this," said the chief officer: "Do you think we can undertake to keep such a good watch and ward over them that during our stay at an inn

or any other place they will have no opportunity of escaping?"

"What's your opinion on the subject, sir?"

"I think we might arrange to do it somehow—in fact, we must, for our horses will require rest as well as ourselves."

"And," said the officers, "although we may allow them to have something to eat and drink, it need not be much—only just sufficient to keep body and soul together, and nothing stronger than water for them to drink. They won't get their strength up very well in that case."

"That must be it," said the chief officer. "We will push on for awhile longer, and when we come to an inn we will stop and take some refreshment."

"But which will be the best way of transporting the prisoners?" asked one. "They have no horses. What are we to do with them?"

"It seems to me there is only one thing," returned the chief, "and that is, for your horses to take it in turns to ride double."

"As how?"

"I mean, for instance, when we are starting now, two of you must take Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes on your horses behind you. They must be well and carefully secured. Then, when we have gone a certain distance, we will make an exchange, and so not tire one horse more than another, and give each officer a share of removing the prisoners."

This proposition was unanimously consented to.

The officers immediately set about carrying their instructions into effect.

Having decided among themselves which should carry the prisoners first, they went up to both, and made some alterations in the bonds by which they were secured.

Mr. Noakes still continued in the same deathlike condition, and after a little deliberation, a small quantity of brandy, taken from a flask, was poured down his throat.

It revived him to a considerable extent.

In the first place, Jonathan Wild's hands were placed behind his back, and handcuffed there.

Then he was lifted by main force and put on a horse behind one of the police officers.

A long piece of strong rope was then produced, which was first of all secured to one ankle, then passed underneath the horse's belly, and then tied securely to the other.

This would prevent him from getting his legs at liberty.

The next thing was to secure him to the officer behind whom he rode, so that he could not possibly give him the slip.

In order to do this, a couple of belts the officers wore were produced, and by the buckles joined into one.

The double belt was then placed round Wild and the officer, and buckled tight.

Perhaps a more ingenious or more effectual mode of taking a prisoner from one place to another on horseback could scarcely be devised.

Jonathan knew it, and gnashed his teeth with rage.

It was no original idea of the police officers, but one which they had borrowed from him.

He was the first who had invented this neat little arrangement, in doing which he had all unconsciously prepared a rod for his own back.

CHAPTER DCLVIII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS COMMENCE THEIR JOURNEY TO LONDON WITH THEIR PRISONERS.

ALL his curses were, however, productive of not the slightest good to himself.

The officers heard him muttering in a low tone to himself, and managed to catch a few of the words.

All they did was to laugh at him for his impotent rage—for impotent it was, to all intents and purposes.

As if he had been a sack of grain, or any other object equally inanimate, Mr. Noakes allowed his foes to bind him just as they thought proper, and place him on a horse in the same manner as his companion, Jonathan Wild.

The two bundles of booty, which in their alarm they

had dropped on the beach, were picked up by the police officers, and secured.

The production of these things would, at any rate, form one case against them—certainly enough to get them committed to prison.

The chief officer and his men were in the highest possible spirits at the success they had met with.

They were overjoyed to think that it had been reserved for them to achieve what all the others had failed to do.

And to them alone would belong the honour of having captured such a notorious and daring offender as Jonathan Wild.

It was, then, in the highest possible spirits that they mounted their horses, and rode along the lonely lane leading from the sea-shore into the interior of the country.

We feel that some explanation is due as to the presence of the officers upon this spot at that particular time.

Strange as it may seem, it was nevertheless the simplest thing in the world.

By dint of hard riding and many inquiries, the police officers Wild had so often baffled managed to trace him to the spot where he stole the boat.

They were not in time to prevent him from setting out to sea.

But they perceived the boat flying over the waves, and without delay got into another, and gave chase.

But, as Jonathan had fully expected, the police officers, perceiving the unfavourable nature of the weather, and knowing the great risk of their lives that they ran, had determined to put back to the shore, and await the issue of events.

All were much chagrined at this disappointment.

It was hard indeed to think that their prey should have slipped through their fingers in such an easy manner.

And at the very last moment a kind of consultation was held, and they endeavoured to come to some conclusion as to the course Jonathan Wild would be most likely to adopt.

"Rely upon it," said one, "as soon as he finds we have given up the pursuit—and he won't be long in making that discovery—he will turn the head of his vessel towards the sea-shore, and land again at some unexpected point—somewhere out of sight of people."

"Very likely," said the officer to whom these words were addressed; "but I don't see how that benefits us in the least. We have lost him, and we must resign ourselves to that loss."

"Well, perhaps so—perhaps not."

"I think it quite certain!" was the gruff reply.

"I don't. Let us keep a good look-out along the coast for as many miles as we possibly can; let us also communicate with the other police officers, so that they may be engaged in a similar manner. It's no good being selfish and allowing the rascals to escape just because we are unable to capture them ourselves."

This was a very reasonable and common-sense view of the question to take, and it was rather surprising that a police officer should speak in such a way.

For a wonder, this good advice was acted upon.

A message was conveyed to the police officers, informing them that Wild and Noakes had seized a boat and put out to sea with it, and that in all probability their intentions were to put back to the shore, and land at some unfrequented point.

This, then, was how it was that the police officers made their appearance so opportunely.

In pursuance of the orders they had received, they had started off from the coast, and were just about commencing to look around them, when, to their equal astonishment and delight, who should they behold but the very two persons of whom they were in search.

Mr. Noakes, secured upon the horse's back, and attached to the police officer before him by a belt, became fully conscious that it was quite in vain for him to indulge in any hope of making his escape.

His doom was sealed at last.

He had been captured and he could no longer avoid his fate.

All those gloomy anticipations in which from time to time he had indulged were now fully realised.

One object, and one object alone, was ever before his mental vision.

That was, the triple tree at Tyburn, where he had

stood so often as a spectator of the execution of others.

Now his own turn had come.

He was also in a kind of delirium, produced not only by the want of food but by the little drop of brandy that the officers had forced between his lips.

Wearily and worn as he was, Jonathan Wild's energies were by no means so much impaired.

He was by no means inclined to resign himself to his fate—to believe that his course was run.

It was never too late to attempt to make an escape—that he knew full well.

Had he not always proved himself to be a cleverer man than any of his foes, and yet had not some prisoners contrived to avoid him?

Why, then, should not he escape, having only ordinary police officers to deal with?

It was but dimly and vaguely that these thoughts passed through his mind as the officers trotted along the road, very much to his discomfiture.

But at last both they and their horses grew tired and hungry, and they began to look out for some place where they could halt for a time and partake of some refreshment.

In England one has not to go far without finding a convenient inn, where something like comfort can be obtained.

And it was soon after this that the officers pulled up in front of a low, straggling building, in the front of which a wooden sign was swinging.

Here they resolved to stop.

The greatest care was taken when dismounting to form a circle round their prisoners, and some doubt was expressed as to whether Jonathan Wild should be removed at all.

At last it was determined to manage matters in the following manner:

The belt was unbuckled, and the rope removed from his ankles; then, as before, they lifted him bodily from his horse.

Jonathan was as patient and resigned as a man could be.

This, however, only made his captors more suspicious, and caused them to redouble their precautions.

Jonathan had an object in view.

While in his present sinking, exhausted state, it was the height of folly for him to think of being able to escape.

No, he must first of all recover some portion of his lost strength, and the only means by which he could do that was to appear humble and cast down before the officers, in order to obtain as much food and drink as he possibly could.

As soon as his feet touched the ground he was seized by many hands, so that had he been in full possession of his strength he could not have broken loose from such a firm detaining hold.

Mr. Noakes was treated in a similar fashion.

And in this manner the triumphant police officers led their prisoners into the inn.

The landlord and all his family came forward, full of surprise at such an unusual spectacle.

Such a thing as a body of police officers halting with a couple of prisoners at their house had never been known before, and their curiosity was accordingly stimulated by it.

"We must have a room—a large room—all to ourselves," said the chief officer.

"Very good," replied the landlord. "I am happy to say that I can accommodate you."

"It is not accommodating me," was the police officer's rejoinder; "I demand this of you in the name of his most gracious Majesty the King!"

CHAPTER DCLIX.

THE POLICE OFFICERS FIND JONATHAN WILD A VERY TROUBLESOME CUSTOMER.

"I AM as well pleased to oblige his Majesty as to oblige yourself," returned the landlord, who thought it best to be civil to his unusual visitors.

The fact was, he was one of those men who always thought it best to curry favour with the authorities, and

so far as he himself was concerned he was quite ready to allow the police officers to do just exactly as they liked.

With a profusion of bows, he led the way along the passage, and then flung open a door, saying:

"Walk in, gentlemen—pry walk in; and I hope you will find that room will answer your purpose."

The police officers stalked in.

It was their determination to keep their prisoners constantly before them—not to allow them to be out of their sight for a single moment.

While they adhered to this determination, one would think that there could not be any possible fears of an escape.

A substantial meal was called for.

"I am sorry to say I have nothing in the house ready for you, gentlemen," replied the landlord, "but I shall be happy to prepare a meal that will please you—I will promise not to be long about it!"

"Mind you are not!" said the chief officer.

The landlord withdrew, and, in order to pass away the time pleasantly, the officers took a little of something to create an appetite, and smoked the pipes of peace.

And all the time they had the inexpressible gratification of feasting their eyes with the sight of their prisoners.

Four men only had captured them, and therefore, when they had added up the amount of the joint reward, there was not much difficulty in separating the total into quarters.

Then each man found that he had something considerable for his share—something that would enable him to go on all right and comfortable for a twelvemonth at least.

It was quite a windfall for them, and one and all considered the reward was just as much theirs as though it had been in their pockets at that precise moment of time.

There were the two men, undoubtedly.

They were entirely secure.

A conviction would follow as a matter of course.

As for an escape, they trusted to their cleverness to prevent any misfortune of that kind.

Like some evil spirit, Jonathan Wild sat glowering at his foes.

Two large oaken chairs had been placed back to back in the centre of the room.

In these Noakes and Wild had been seated, and around them the officers were grouped, so that all could satisfy themselves by having a most excellent view.

At last a large joint of beef and plenty of vegetables, with a host of other things, were brought in and placed upon the table.

Jonathan looked at the viands with hungry, eager eyes.

The officers sat down to take their feed first, and the manner in which they despatched the provisions was something alarming to witness.

Most of all was it aggravating to the two famishing men, who felt almost as though they would risk their lives in order to obtain a morsel.

But when the officers were done, a small quantity was placed upon two plates, and these two plates given to Wild and Noakes.

In order that they might eat, the handcuffs were removed.

But they took care, before doing so, to bind their bodies securely to the heavy chairs in which they sat.

It was a astonishing to see how Wild devoured the miserable morsel of food that was put for him.

It vanished in a trice.

"More," he said—"more! My bitterest curses on you if you refuse!"

"Don't you wish you may get it, Jonny!" said the chief officer, who, having had a good dinner himself, felt in a particularly good humour. "Not if I know it, Jonny! You shall have just enough to keep body and soul together while you are under my charge, but not a tenth part of an ounce more! I don't mean to let you get your strength up, in order that you may try on some desperate manoeuvre!"

"Drink, then!" said Wild—"give me drink!"

"Oh, yes; I don't mind accommodating you with that! Give him some water—he can't have anything better; that is neither fattening nor strengthening!"

As meekly as a lamb, Jonathan took hold of the jug of cold water that was presented to him, and raised it tremblingly to his lips.

He drank deeply of the contents, and felt much refreshed after having done so.

In fact, he drained the vessel to the bottom.

Then, before anyone could prevent or guess what were his intentions, he flung it with full force at the head of the chief police officer.

He laughed exultingly.

"Take that," he said, "curse you! I wish I could dash your brains out!"

Luckily the police officer saw the missile coming, and, to avoid it, flung himself backwards in his chair with so much violence that he reached the floor with a crash.

The jug struck against the opposite wall, and was smashed into a thousand pieces.

Fraught with rage, the chief officer rose to his feet.

"You villain!" he cried, addressing Wild—"you villain! I will make it hot for you for this! You shall have it! I'll be revenged upon you, never fear!"

Wild was deeply disappointed at this failure, and relapsed into a gloomy silence.

He felt wonderfully better, although he had partaken of such a little food.

It was indeed, so far as the preservation of his life was concerned, quite fortunate that he was not allowed to eat his fill, as doubtless he would have done had he not been controlled.

He looked with wishful eyes towards the glasses of hot rum and water with which the police officers were regaling themselves, and wished—oh, so devoutly!—that he might have the opportunity of draining one of them to the dregs.

That, he felt, would infuse fresh strength into his wearied frame—would enable him to cope successfully with his enemies.

He perceived by their movements and conversation, that they were about to depart.

"I will make an effort!" he muttered. "I can but fail at the most, and if I can only drink a mouthful, my purpose will be gained!"

Jonathan Wild fixed his eyes upon one particular glass of rum and water.

It had just been brought in by the landlord, and was so hot and so strong that the man before whom it was placed could only just sip it with the spoon, waiting for the mixture to get a little cooler.

It was close to Wild—almost within arm's-length of him, and if his strength would only serve him sufficiently to enable him to spring up and drag the chair after him a few paces, he was sure that he could reach it.

At any rate, he felt it was worth making an effort.

Not by any expression of his countenance or any movement of his body did he show what thoughts were passing through his mind, or what were his intentions.

Suddenly, however, he gave utterance to a wild and fearful cry—a cry, coming unexpectedly upon the ears of anyone, sufficient to paralyze them for a moment, and make them wonder what was amiss.

That was the case with the police officers.

They were astounded at hearing such an unearthly sound.

Before they could recover from the temporary state of confusion into which this had thrown them, Jonathan Wild sprang up, dragged the chair after him, and seized the glass.

"Murder!" cried the officer. "Seize him—seize him—he's going to make his escape!"

But Jonathan placed the glass of nearly boiling liquid to his lips, and, tilting it up, allowed the whole to run down his throat in a second.

Before the officers could grasp him—before they could tear the glass from his lips, it was empty.

Then, uttering a cry of exultation, he poised the glass in his hand, and again took aim at the chief officer.

This time with better result, for the heavy goblet caught him on the side of the head, and smashed to pieces.

The police officer was stunned, and fell down in a heap on to the floor.

The greatest confusion then prevailed, and but for the fact that all his movements were hampered by the

chains, it is very likely that Jonathan Wild would have succeeded in making his escape.

CHAPTER DCLX.

JONATHAN WILD INDULGES IN SOME HOPES OF MAKING HIS ESCAPE.

As it was, he made not the least effort.

He was contented with what he had already achieved.

He sank back in the chair, laughing loudly and hideously.

"Keep close watch over him," said one of the officers to his companions. "Shoot him if he attempts to escape; and I will attend to him."

He pointed to the chief officer as he spoke.

Blood was flowing from the side of his face, and he was to all appearances quite bereft of life.

A little cold water and some brandy afterwards, however, served to recover him.

He sat up in a chair, looking very faint and pale.

"You are not much hurt, sir," said the man attending upon him, in a soothing voice. "It is not half as bad as you might expect."

"And Jonathan Wild?"

"He is there safe enough. Don't be alarmed on that account."

The chief officer turned his eyes towards his prisoner, and saw that he was indeed seated in the chair, and that his men were standing around him with their pistols pointed.

"Shoot him if he moves!" he shrieked—"shoot him if he moves!"

"I don't intend to move," said Wild, defiantly; "but if you think you are going to take me up to London without having any trouble or bother, you are very much mistaken! This is only the commencement; you don't know what you will have to go through yet."

"Hark you, Jonathan Wild," said the chief officer. "I intend to stand no nonsense of this sort. If you attempt to escape, I will certainly have you pistoled on the spot. My orders are to capture you alive or dead!"

"I don't care a d—n for you or your orders either!" returned Wild, upon whom the hot rum and water produced a great effect.

"You are very foolish," said another officer. "You might be sure you are only making things worse for yourself—you can't make them any better."

"What do you know about it, stupid! Hold your row!"

Jonathan Wild meanwhile enjoyed the consternation he had produced amongst his enemies.

He resolved inwardly that he would embrace the very next opportunity that presented itself of increasing the effect.

The chief officer had his face bathed, and washed, and bound up with a handkerchief.

"I'd scorn to touch you now," he said, addressing Jonathan; "but I shall be quite satisfied when I see you tucked up at Tyburn. It will be revenge enough for me when I see you dangling at the end of the rope, as I shall do before long. You may depend upon it, when once you get to London, they will make short work of you!"

Jonathan turned a little pale at these words, in spite of himself.

To him, Tyburn Tree always possessed a thousand terrors, and never did it seem more dreadful than at that particular moment.

"Come on," said the chief officer, addressing his men. "Secure them tightly; we will renew our journey, and, depend upon it, we won't stop again until we are actually compelled to it. Never mind a little inconvenience at sticking in the saddle for several hours together—the sooner we get him off our hands the better!"

The whole of the police officers were entirely of this opinion, especially after what they had seen of Jonathan Wild's powers of mischief.

The horses were led round to the front of the inn, and the journey was resumed in just the same fashion as before, except that Wild and Noakes were placed on two different horses, and were secured behind two different police officers.

We have said but little about the latter, and it was because there was, in reality, nothing to say.

Like some one only half animate, he had sat all the time in the chair, neither attempting to move hand nor foot.

When the plate of food was placed before him, it is true, he hastily devoured every fragment.

But he surrendered the plate quietly, and then fell back into the same mood of listless apathy.

She sun was now declining in the sky.

Ere long he would set, and there were indications that the night would be a dark and blustering one.

It was in the darkness that Jonathan Wild hoped to do some good for himself.

His behaviour will show that he had by no means abandoned the hope of being able to make his escape.

On the contrary, now that he felt fresh life coursing through his veins, he dwelt upon it more and more, and the result was a confidence in his ability to succeed.

Gradually the daylight gave place to darkness.

Confusing shadows crept over the landscape, deepening and deepening every moment, until at last all became wrapt in obscurity.

The officers were obliged to keep close together in order not to lose sight of one another.

More than one of them thought that perhaps it would have been the wisest plan to have remained all night at the inn, instead of setting out upon their journey, for they were conscious that the darkness would afford their prisoners a better opportunity of getting away.

A complete change, however, had to all appearance come over Jonathan Wild.

He was perfectly still behind the officer, never attempting to move hand nor foot.

But all the while that his body was so passive his mind was very actively employed.

He was scheming and wondering by what possible means he could succeed in separating himself from the man to whom he was bound.

Surely no one, except a desperate man like Wild, who had made up his mind that he could only lose his life once, would have ever thought of attempting to escape under such circumstances.

Even if he performed the apparently impossible feat of slipping off the horse without the knowledge of the man to whom he was attached, what chance then would he have of getting clear away?

He was on foot, and weary, and tired.

There was a certain amount of strength in his body now, but it was of a transient nature, and the least active exertion would serve to deprive him of it.

On the other hand, the police officers were all mounted on good horses, which had just been baited, and were in capital condition for the road.

Moreover, it was not necessary for them that they should carry him to London alive.

Their instructions were to capture him at all hazards, living or dead.

Supposing, then, that he might run for a few paces, he would be fired at, and no one could believe that all the shots so fired would be ineffectual.

It must not be thought that Jonathan Wild did not weigh over all these disadvantages in his mind.

He was fully conscious of every one of them.

But his active brain was at work, and he was wondering how he could make things favourable.

It seemed an impossible task.

When he noticed, however, how much darker the night grew, his courage grew stronger and stronger.

At last he imagined the time had come for him to commence his operations.

The first thing he had to do was to free his wrists from the handcuffs by which they were bound.

Even to start with, this seemed a total impossibility.

Yet Jonathan Wild did not so consider it.

He tried first of all to clasp his hands together behind his back and force his wrists outwards in the hope that he might succeed in breaking the connecting link.

He soon found out, however, that the handcuffs were too strongly made for that to be possible.

But yet he by no means despaired of accomplishing his purpose.

Squeezing up his left hand, which he knew was smaller than his right, into the smallest possible compass, he gradually tugged away at the handcuff, and tried to draw the rim over the back of his hand.

He pulled and tugged with all his might, causing himself exquisite pain, and yet bearing it with the stoicism of a martyr.

And although he pulled and tugged so violently, yet it was done steadily, and the man behind whom he was riding never for a moment guessed what he was about.

Tighter and tighter became the rim of the handcuff across the back of his hand.

Deeper and deeper it seemed to sink into the flesh, and then when he pulled it again the skin moved with it.

The pain was excruciating, and Jonathan had to clench his teeth hard to prevent a cry of pain escaping from his lips.

CHAPTER DCLXI.

JONATHAN WILD SUCCEEDS IN GIVING THE OFFICERS A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

But he did suppress it, and tugged away manfully again.

Harder and harder he pulled with a continuous strain, and all the time he was encouraged to continue his exertions, for the handcuff was slowly but surely being drawn over the back of his hand.

The knuckles had to be passed, and after that it would be easy enough to slip them off altogether.

Of course, at present it would be quite sufficient for him to have one hand at liberty.

He did not care about the manacle dangling from his wrist—that was an inconvenience he could get rid of at some future time.

Jonathan could almost have shrieked with exultation when he found that his hand was free.

At present, however, he made no demonstration of the power he had gained, but kept his hands in precisely the same position as they had before occupied, so that the officers never for one moment suspected that his hands were at liberty.

Then he began to wonder how he should overcome the other obstacles.

Having so far succeeded, it was a great encouragement to him to persevere.

He felt that the great difficulty was concerning the rope by which his ankles were tied together under the horse's belly.

He came to the conclusion that it would be quite out of his power for him to attempt to loosen the rope.

But an idea entered into his head by which the necessity for doing so might be avoided.

It was a thought that surely could have occurred only to a desperate man in a desperate situation, like he was.

It was risking his life to make the attempt.

But yet, if he succeeded, all would be well.

And this was the view Jonathan took of it.

If he was killed, why then he was no worse off, for if he allowed himself to remain passive in the hands of his captors he would, before many days were over, be swinging at Tyburn.

His idea was to suddenly unbuckle the belt by which he was secured to the police officer, and then to throw himself violently backwards.

He considered if he was speedy in his movements he should fall to the ground over the horse's hind quarters, the rope being slack enough to allow him to do so.

He would reach the ground with great force beyond doubt.

He might be trodden upon by the horse's heels, but he would be free.

And then all he would have to do would be to struggle to his feet and hasten off.

A most desperate feat to attempt to execute—one that, in truth, seemed little short of suicide.

After some more deliberation, Jonathan resolved to attempt to carry out his plan.

Looking around him, he fancied he recognised some of the scenery—in fact, he was sure he did.

And then he suddenly recollected that some short distance in advance there was a wide, swift-flowing river, which was spanned by a stone bridge.

Here he determined should be the spot fixed upon for his attempt.

As he drew nearer and nearer to it, he noticed that there

was a thick, white mist, which probably ascended from the river.

This white mist or fog would be of immense benefit to him, since it would cover his escape.

A dozen steps would take him out of sight of his foes.

He looked keenly at each side of him in order to catch a sight of the stream.

As soon as he saw it he began to unbuckle the belt.

This he could do with perfect ease, for the buckle happened to be just behind his back.

Holding his hands in the same position as before, or apparently doing so, he quietly undid the buckle.

Then, according to his preconcerted arrangement, just as the officers were galloping over the bridge, he flung himself backwards, and in a second fell upon the roadway with terrific force—so much force indeed, as to deprive him of all the breath there was in his body.

"Murder—murder!" cried the officer, whose surprise at the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the prisoner may perhaps be imagined—"murder—murder!"

"What's the matter?"

"An escape—an escape!" he cried—"Jonathan Wild has escaped!"

The horses were going at a good speed, and a moment or so elapsed before they could bring the animals to a standstill.

They had then completely crossed the bridge.

"How has it happened?" cried the chief officer—"how has it happened? It must be impossible!"

"He is gone," was the response, "and must have the devil to aid him! He dropped from behind as suddenly as lightning!"

"Where were we then?"

"Just on the bridge."

"Forward, then!" said the officer. "Don't despair, my men—we shall have him yet. This mist is awkward; but, however, if you catch a glimpse of him, fire—bring him down! Surely we should not have so much trouble to carry his dead body!"

They hastened back to the bridge, and just as they reached it they heard a loud, heavy splash.

"That's him," cried the chief officer—"that's him! He has jumped into the river. Now, then, we have him as sure as fate!"

At a breakneck speed the officer and his followers hastened down to the bank of the river.

The surface of the water was completely shrouded in the mist that hovered over it.

They strained their eyes greatly, and endeavoured to pierce it, but no trace of Jonathan Wild could they see.

"There he is," cried a voice, suddenly—"there he is—I see him—look, that's his head!"

"Fire—fire!" yelled the chief officer—"down with him!"

There was a rattling volley, and then some dark object, looking very much like a man's head, that had been floating on the surface of the river sank down at once.

"Come on," said the chief officer—"come on—we must have him either alive or dead! Curse this mist, it gets thicker and thicker!"

And now, if Mr. Noakes had only one-tenth part of the courage and daring that Wild possessed, he would certainly have succeeded in making his escape, for he had been left upon the bridge, guarded only by the man to whom he was bound.

It is difficult almost to imagine what Jonathan Wild himself would have done had he found himself in such a situation.

But Mr. Noakes, entirely crushed and humbled, and buried in a state of sullen apathy, made not the least movement to free himself.

The officers, frantic with rage, and beginning to believe that Jonathan Wild had escaped after all, searched vigorously up and down both sides of the river, without being able to find anything of their prisoner.

"Curse him!" said the chief officer. "He must have escaped, and there's three-quarters of the reward gone at once! Don't despair, my men! We must not give up! At all hazards we will capture him!"

But, although they continued watching and searching during the remainder of the night, they could see nothing of Jonathan Wild.

He had vanished entirely and completely.

At last daylight came, and when the rising sun dispersed the mist, it showed the four remaining police officers with their one remaining prisoner, still standing by the river's bank.

But now that it was daylight their search met with no better reward than at first.

Not with all their cleverness and skill could they find a single trace of where Wild had gone.

An anxious deliberation was then held.

The chief officer was in such a state of frantic rage and excitement that he scarcely knew what he was saying.

So his men had it nearly all their own way.

After much discussion and dispute, it was eventually decided that it would be better to make sure of the one prisoner they had caught.

While hampered with him, they could not properly commence another fresh chase after Jonathan Wild, as they evidently would have to do in order to capture him.

It was resolved unanimously, therefore, that they should proceed to London with Mr. Noakes, taking care that he did not slip through their fingers, and then, so soon as they had securely lodged him in Newgate, to return to that particular spot, and renew their search until it was successful.

Perhaps, after all, this was the best determination they could come to, though it was terribly galling to them to know that they had actually had the great Jonathan Wild safe in their clutches, and that they had suffered him to escape.

They would be laughed at and mocked by the rest.

Yet they comforted themselves with thinking that, after all, things were not so very bad, and that, as soon as Mr. Noakes was safely inside Newgate, they would make up for the accident that had befallen them.

CHAPTER DCLXII.

RELATES WHAT HAPPENED TO JONATHAN WILD AFTER HIS FALL UPON THE BRIDGE.

In this place, we may as well give some solution to the mystery of Jonathan Wild's sudden and remarkable disappearance.

When he fell back in the road in the manner we have related, he remained insensible for the space of a few seconds, and then rolled over.

He struggled to his feet.

He found that he was bruised and badly hurt.

The back of his head had come with terrific violence upon the hard high-road.

Yet, beyond a racking pain, he felt very little the worse.

Convinced now that rapidity of movement combined with stratagem alone could save him, Jonathan darted suddenly to the side of the bridge.

By the time he had done this, the officers had pulled up their horses and were returning.

A dim idea of how he should next proceed had already formed itself in Jonathan's mind.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of inexpressible thankfulness that he noticed one of the large coping-stones on the bridge was loose.

It moved easily under his hand.

Summoning all his strength, he gave this stone a vigorous push.

It rolled over at once.

Then followed a tremendous splash—the splash that reached the ears of the officers so plainly, and which misled them just as Jonathan fully intended it should.

At that very instant when they rushed across the bridge, being fully impressed with the belief that he was struggling in the water, Jonathan Wild was concealed only by crouching down in the shadow that was cast by the parapet of the bridge.

Of course the mist of which we have spoken favoured his movements greatly.

Without it, in fact, it is questionable whether he would have succeeded in making his escape.

No sooner had the officers passed him than he hurried forward.

He knew that every second thus gained would be of incalculable importance.

"Escaped!" he said—"I have escaped! Glorious

news! I am free and alone! I believe my race is nearly run, but yet before I die I will wreak so much misery and mischief that my name shall never be forgotten!"

He stooped down as he spoke, and, with a knife that he took from his pocket, cut the cords by which his ankles had been tied together.

He could now run with a certain amount of ease—not very rapidly, however, for, besides being in a dreadful state of weakness, he was cramped by having remained so long in one position upon the back of the horse.

One would have thought he would have retraced his steps towards the sea-shore, in the hope of getting away from his foes.

But, so far from doing this, he positively took his way towards London.

Not by the high-road, for he forced his way through a hedge, and, having gone for some distance, laid himself down beneath the shadow of it to rest, and prepare himself for fresh exertions.

"How easily they are deceived!" he said, chuckling to himself with satisfaction. "I could scarcely have hoped that they would have fallen into the snare so blindly! It seems to me as though they are going to watch for me all night, in the hope of finding me in the morning. I hope they will—I shall then have all the better chance of getting entirely free from them."

Jonathan Wild entirely disencumbered his ankles of the rope, and then resolved to push forward once more.

Wisely he started at a walking pace, and determined not to exceed it.

He was sure that eventually he would get over a much greater space of ground at this rate than he would if he started off at a run, which would only have the effect of completely exhausting him.

But before he had gone far he found how terribly worn out he was.

All his energies flagged, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he could drag one leg after the other.

But he still struggled on painfully and slowly.

He had to rest at frequent intervals.

But he kept on until within a short time before day-break.

He was then at a considerable distance from the bridge, where he had made such a frightfully perilous escape.

Before him were some outbuildings belonging to a farm, and towards these he crept wearily, thinking he should be able to conceal himself and obtain rest during the day.

He entered the first shed he came to, and found that it was nearly full of straw.

Not without a very great deal of trouble, and after failing once or twice, he succeeded in climbing up to the top of it.

Then, pushing the straw aside, he lowered himself into it, getting deeper and deeper down, so that, if anyone came suddenly into the place, they would be unable to see anything of him, or suspect that the shed was tenanted by anyone.

Panting and weary, here he remained, listening in terror to every slight sound, and fearing all the time that the officers would track his footsteps, find out his place of concealment, and drag him forth.

But time passed on without the occurrence of any such event.

All around him continued still and peaceful. The whole day rolled by, and during the whole of the time not a single person entered the shed.

By this time he knew the officers must have got a considerable distance on their road to London, for that they would linger all day about the spot, or retrace their steps, he scarcely thought possible.

In fact, he reasoned correctly enough like the officers themselves, that it would be much better policy to secure the one prisoner they had got and put him into safe keeping, than to incur the risk of losing him as well.

What should be his future plan of operations?

How he should act—in what manner he should gratify his revenge, Wild did not know.

He felt at first that he must get up his strength.

He had subdued his hunger partially during the day by chewing up the straw around him, in some of which, as the wheat had been insufficiently threshed, he found a few grains of corn.

But at nightfall he ventured to creep out.

He went to the door of the shed, and reconnoitred well before he attempted to emerge.

But all around him was solitude.

Not a single living thing could be seen.

He crept across the field in which the shed stood, until he came to another.

This one was cultivated, and though he had not passed much of his time in the country, yet he guessed what was growing there.

They were turnips, and he pulled one up and ate it voraciously.

Poor and unnutritious as the food was, yet it served to deaden the pangs of hunger.

Moreover, it was cold, and moist, and assuaged his thirst at the same time.

But he felt that he must have something more substantial than that.

In rather better spirits than before, he continued to creep across the fields towards the homestead, which was visible at no great distance.

It was his intention to ask for charity—for something to eat.

But suddenly he stopped.

All at once he recollected the manacle that was dangling from his wrist.

While that was there it was quite out of the question to think of making any such application.

It would not be entertained for a moment.

How, then, was he to rid himself of this disagreeable ornament?

He looked all around in search of some object that would answer his purpose.

But he saw nothing.

He was obliged at last to pause at a large block of stone that was lying in his path.

On this he laid his hand, and, with a smaller piece of stone, struck the iron band several heavy blows.

He bruised and hurt himself sadly; but, unmindful of trifling inconveniences, he persevered until at length the iron was broken and his hand free.

"There," he said, "now I am rid of it, and am most thankful."

As he spoke, he picked up the broken handcuff and threw it over the fields as far as ever he could.

Then once more he resumed his way towards the farmhouse.

Early as it was in the evening, its inhabitants seemed already preparing to go to rest.

But Jonathan knocked boldly at the front door.

"Charity—charity!" he exclaimed, in an indistinct and husky voice. "Have pity upon me—I am hungry—nearly starving! I have not tasted food for very many hours. In mercy find me a little—only a little, or I shall die at your threshold!"

CHAPTER DCLXIII.

RELATES HOW MR. NOAKES WAS BROUGHT TO LONDON AND PLACED UPON HIS TRIAL.

LET us take a glance at the proceedings of Mr. Noakes and those officers by whom he was held captive.

With regard to the journey to London, there is little to be said.

He continued helpless and dejected—almost motionless during the whole of the time.

So wretched and so woe-begone was he—so entirely dispirited, that he won even the compassion of the police officers.

They were by no means so strict with him as they were at first, for they saw he had not the courage to make a single movement.

From time to time they looked out during their journey, hoping to see something of Jonathan Wild, yet not succeeding in so doing.

Whenever it was practicable, they also made inquiries concerning him.

They described his personal appearance with great accuracy.

But no one had seen any such person.

A caution, however, was left with all if such a man presented himself they were to use every means in their power to make him prisoner, telling them of the large reward they would obtain for such a service.

It was rather early in the morning when Mr. Noakes and his captors rode into London.

The poor wretch looked shiveringly all about him, and contrasted his present position with that which he had formerly occupied as Governor of Newgate.

It was all through Jonathan Wild.

It was upon the ex-thief-taker that he laid the whole of the blame.

But for him he might have remained in his original situation.

Now he was led through the streets a common, proscribed felon, and he knew there were charges enough hanging over him to secure his condemnation to death.

What vexed and galled him most, however, was the thought that, while he had been captured, Jonathan Wild should have made his escape.

Death, he felt, would have had one pang less had Jonathan Wild stood beside him on the scaffold to share it.

But that was not to be.

The police court was open by the time they reached Bow Street, so, without delay, Mr. Noakes was led before the magistrate in order to obtain his committal to Newgate.

It soon got noised abroad that the old Governor of Newgate, who had perpetrated, in conjunction with Jonathan Wild, so many atrocious crimes, was in custody, and the court-room was quickly choked to suffocation.

The object of the police officers was to bring something forward sufficient to warrant the magistrate in making out the committal.

The bundles of booty were accordingly produced.

"Your worship," said the chief officer, "when I captured him, he had one of these bundles with him, but in his alarm he dropped it on the ground. You will see now what it contains."

From out of the bundle was produced one after the other the various articles belonging to the communion service that had been stolen by Wild and Noakes.

Every heart was grieved to see such fair, and noble, and sacred ornaments battered and spoiled as they were.

Nothing could be done to them but put into the melting pot, and that was exactly what Wild had designed to be their fate.

"Prisoner at the bar," said the magistrate, "have you anything to say on your behalf?"

"Nothing—nothing," moaned Mr. Noakes. "I am a wretched, miserable man, and tired of life! I confess all—all—everything I confess, for I am guilty."

"That will do," said the magistrate. "Remove him."

Mr. Noakes accordingly was removed to Newgate.

Although it is not possible to feel any pity for such a man, yet it must not be forgotten that he was human and had feelings.

What a terrible lesson must it have been to him then when, after so long an absence, he at length found himself before the gloomy, frowning walls of the prison of which he had been so long the Governor.

Bitter, humiliating thoughts passed through his mind.

It is certain that at that moment he bitterly and deeply regretted all that he had done in the past; but his repentance, like repentance generally, came too late.

He cast one glance up at the black stone building—one glance, that seemed to take in every portion of it from the ground to the parapet, and then he fixed his eyes upon the ground, nor did he venture to raise them.

There was no need for him to look which way he was going.

Every inch of the ground upon which he was now treading was as familiar to him as ground can possibly be.

Then the police officers stopped, and although he did not look up, he knew that it was before that little door in Newgate through which prisoners are led.

Heavy blows were given upon the knocker.

The ponderous door rolled back upon its hinges.

He was hurried up the steps, and then he found himself standing in the vestibule.

How well he recollected the last time when he had stood there.

It was on the occasion of Jonathan Wild being brought a prisoner to Newgate.

Now he was there a prisoner himself.

Looking around him, he saw many old faces among the turnkeys and other officials of the prison.

But not one bent upon him a sympathising glance.

He remembered then, with some regret, that he had taken no pains whatever to make a friend of one of them.

He had treated all uniformly with cruelty and indifference.

Now the time had come for them to show the hatred that they bore him.

The new Governor of the prison was summoned, and he stared coolly at his predecessor.

"All right!" he said. "Number thirty-four is vacant, is it not?"

"It is, sir," said one of the turnkeys.

"Very good. Let him be placed there, and keep double watch at the door of his cell. We must mind that he does not make his escape."

There was little fear of that, however.

The miserable object was resigned to his fate.

Surely the time was now past for him to make any manifestation.

"Had we not better put a little jewellery upon him, sir?" asked one of the turnkeys.

He spoke maliciously.

He recollected, and so did Mr. Noakes, an occasion when he had been brutally kicked by the Governor of the prison.

"No—no!" said the new Governor. "No fetters have been ordered, so I shall not presume to put any on; but keep watch over his cell—keep watch over him."

"Will you allow me to undertake that duty, sir?" said the turnkey who had before spoken.

"Yes, if you wish it."

The man's eyes gleamed with satisfaction, and certainly while he was outside the prison door Mr. Noakes would have no chance of obtaining his liberty.

Through the well-remembered and familiar passages Mr. Noakes was led.

He knew as well as any of them which was number thirty-four.

He could have found his way there blindfold.

At length they paused.

The door was unlocked and unbarred, and he was thrust rudely in.

But no indignities seemed to have the least effect upon him.

So great had his apathy become, that it appeared nothing in this world could ever rouse him from it.

And so several days passed away, Mr. Noakes gradually becoming better, for the peace and quietude of his cell had a favourable effect upon him.

Yet he was a miserable, careworn wretch, and when, at length, on the day of his trial, he was placed in the dock, all who saw him mentally remarked:

"What a miserable object he seems! Surely it would be a mercy and a charity to hang him."

During his imprisonment, the officers of police had not been idle.

They had carefully collected a lot of details concerning the murder of the old miser in the rail, and it was upon this charge that they first of all determined to try Mr. Noakes.

A long account of the murder, and the manner in which it was discovered, was read over from the indictment by the Clerk of the Arraignment.

Mr. Noakes only partially comprehended its purport, yet he knew it was something in connection with the murder at the mill.

He remembered that awful scene in the dark, underground passage, when he had rushed forward upon the defenceless old man and stabbed him until he died.

He shuddered perceptibly as the recollection crossed his mind.

Then, in his usual monotonous, unemotional voice, the Clerk of the Arraignment said:

"Prisoner at the bar, do you plead guilty or not guilty to the charge now brought against you?"

There was on the instant a deep and impressive silence. The fall of a pin might have been heard in that crowded court.

Mr. Noakes made several attempts to speak, and then at last he managed to gasp out, half articulately:

"Guilty, my lord—guilty!"



[MR. NOAKES AWAITING THE ORDER FOR HIS EXECUTION.]

CHAPTER DCLXIV.

SENTENCE OF DEATH IS PASSED UPON MR. NOAKES.

OF course this admission of guilt on the part of the prisoner at the bar at once put an end to the case.

The matter was taken entirely out of the hands of both jurymen and counsel, and it rested only with the judge to pronounce sentence.

Those police officers who had made themselves so particularly active in raking together all the facts they possibly could connected with the prisoner looked wofully disappointed.

They would have been much better pleased if they had had the opportunity of standing up in the witness-box and giving an account of the whole of their proceedings, that they might show how very energetic they were.

But Noakes deprived them of the opportunity, and they had him bitterly in consequence.

No. 142.—**BLUESKIN.**

"Prisoner at the bar," said the clerk of the arraigns, "you have pleaded guilty to an indictment charging you with wilful murder; what have you to say why the court should not proceed to pass judgment upon you?"

Mr. Noakes made no reply, and, with scarcely a perceptible pause, the judge said:

"By your own confession you stand convicted of the crime of murder. I am glad to see that there are some signs of contrition visible in you. By adopting this course you have saved much valuable time and trouble, and all that remains for me to do is to pass sentence of death upon you in the usual form. Before doing so, however, I cannot help expressing my surprise and regret that a man occupying the position you have should be standing there on such a charge. The greatest trust was placed in you, and you have wantonly abused it. The mere catalogue of the crimes you have committed would make any one shudder, but you can receive no greater penalty than

death for all that you have done; therefore, the sentence of the court upon you is, that you be taken from hence to the prison from which you came, and from there to the place of common execution, and that you be there hanged by the neck until you are dead."

The judge ceased, and Mr. Noakes, looking whiter than ever, stood clutching the front of the dock in order to prevent himself from falling to the ground.

There was no sympathy whatever, either in the tones of the judge's voice or in the hearts of any of the people who on that morning crowded the court.

They all felt that the prisoner most righteously deserved the doom which had been pronounced upon him.

Mr. Noakes's lips were observed to be moving slightly, but no one could tell what he said.

One of the turnkeys touched him on the shoulder and motioned him away.

The miserable wretch gave one glance all around him, and then descended the flight of winding steps that led from the floor of the dock to the cells beneath.

He was then taken to one of the condemned cells and locked in.

At the door was the man who had shown himself so anxious to undertake the duty of keeping guard.

He scarcely left his post from the time of Mr. Noakes's first appearance in the prison, and there was little likelihood that he would do so until the hour for his execution arrived.

Mr. Noakes shuddered when he saw this man's eyes bent upon him with so ferocious an expression.

When at last seated in his cell, a sensation of great relief came over him.

Dreadful as was the prospect he had in view, yet he was now certain that he knew the worst.

Fate could do no more, and he had only to resign himself.

At the first this appeared easy and simple enough.

The remainder of the day wore away and night came.

It was during the darkness that a change began to take place in Mr. Noakes's feelings.

Every time that he heard the clock at St. Paul's peal forth the hour, it suggested to him the thought that he was so much nearer death, and when he once began to think of it in this light, the striking of the clock seemed to be almost incessant.

Morning came and found him haggard and miserable.

The man on guard looked into the cell as soon as ever it was daylight, and gave a grin of exultation when he saw that the prisoner was all safe.

He was well pleased also to observe the look of utter wretchedness and misery on his features.

"You don't seem at all comfortable, Mr. Noakes," he said—"not half so comfortable as you ought to be. All your little worldly affairs are now settled; what need have you to work yourself up into such a nervous condition?"

Mr. Noakes averted his head and made no reply.

That day was Saturday.

On the Monday morning following it had been arranged that his execution should take place.

How that day passed he scarcely knew.

He was in a state of the most dreadful terror that can possibly be conceived, and the nearer that death approached him, the more alarmed and terrified did he become.

Yet he made no attempt at escape.

Perhaps he knew that any effort would be futile.

No one understood better than himself the power of hate, and the man who was on guard at the door of his cell would take—he felt convinced—every precaution to prevent him from getting away.

In reality, however, he had neither the courage nor the strength of mind to make the least attempt towards his liberation.

But he sat there restlessly rocking himself backwards and forwards on his stone seat, wishing his miserable life was at an end, and at the same time, by a strange contradiction, lamenting the rapid flight of every hour.

On Sunday morning he was led into the chapel.

The other prisoners were there—others who, like himself, were condemned to be executed on the following morning.

It was the duty of the Ordinary on these occasions to preach a funeral sermon.

A hideous mockery it seemed to all of them.

The news of Mr. Noakes's capture quickly spread itself all over London, and the interest that was felt in his fate was second only to that which would have been taken in that of Jonathan Wild.

His capture they hoped and trusted would follow next.

In the meantime they were all anxious to obtain a sight of the ex-Governor of Newgate, and those authorities who had power to issue orders of admission to the chapel on Sunday morning were literally besieged by importunate applicants.

But the accommodation for spectators was very limited.

There was only one small gallery in which they could sit.

Long before the hour for the commencement of the service they had taken their seats in this gallery, so closely packed together that they could scarcely move or breathe.

Mr. Noakes only looked up once at the crowd of eager faces.

He knew there would be no one there who would bend a pitying glance upon him.

Moreover, the appearance of the multitude reminded him of a sight which he had often seen, and which he was destined to see once more in his life.

This was the mass of upturned faces standing around Tyburn Tree.

How glad he was when the service was concluded, and he was led back to his cell!

But his state of agitation continued to increase every moment.

The death which, when contemplated from a distance, seemed such a happy release and termination to all his troubles, now presented itself in the most hideous colours to his imagination.

It possessed a thousand terrors, and the longer he contemplated and the closer he drew to it, the more numerous did those terrors become.

He felt, indeed, that he should never live to stand beneath the gallows and have the rope placed round his neck—fright would kill him before then.

Could it have been known how much he suffered before the time of his execution, people would have said that it was no inadequate punishment for all that he had done.

Hour after hour was struck by the church clock—closer and closer came the fatal Monday morning.

The daylight gradually waned away and faded out of his cell.

As he watched the darkness gradually deepening, he remembered, with a shudder of the utmost dread, that never again in life would he be able to observe it.

He would see the morning break—he would see the sun rise, but never see it set again.

CHAPTER DCLXV.

MR. NOAKES BELIEVES THAT HE SHALL BE ABLE TO EFFECT HIS ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE.

At last, Mr. Noakes's feelings became worked up to such a pitch that he felt he could no longer sit still and stare death calmly in the face as he had done.

Courage was rising in his breast to attempt to make some effort to release himself.

Not that he could indulge in any sanguine hopes of achieving his purpose.

Yet there was a chance that he might succeed.

Others had broken out of prison before, and why should not he?

Hope began to rise up in his breast.

Perhaps, after all, his span of life was not so short as he had imagined it.

At any rate, he resolved to try to make it longer.

He looked back with a sigh to those times when upon highway and byway he ran so much risk and danger in company with Jonathan Wild.

How gladly would he have exchanged his present position for that which had formerly been his, and with which he was so discontented!

He groaned, and reproached himself over and over again for the dissatisfaction that he had shown, and

wished that he had left matters more to Jonathan Wild's direction than he had done.

Then he began to wonder what had become of his companion.

To him his escape seemed nothing short of miraculous.

"Surely," he murmured to himself, "if Jonathan could make his escape under such circumstances as those, why should not I from this place? In comparison, mine seems an easy task to his."

He rose to his feet and looked carefully all around the cell, debating within himself as to which point he should commence his operations at.

No portion of the cell was unfamiliar to him; he knew just where the window looked, and was well acquainted with the strength of the iron bars with which it was protected.

For some moments he stood looking up at this small aperture, and then he shook his head and turned away.

He had come to the conclusion that it would not be possible for him to escape in that direction.

Some other means must be tried.

Naturally his attention was directed to the door.

But this seemed strong, firm, and massive, and as though it would resist all the efforts he might make to burst it open.

Besides, not only was it well and carefully secured by bolts, and bars, and locks, but on the other side a man was sitting—a man who had the most implacable hatred against him, and who would watch with the vigilance of a beast of prey to prevent him making his escape.

As these considerations forced themselves upon his notice, Mr. Noakes was almost ready to sink down again in despair.

But after gazing for awhile upon the door, something in its appearance seemed to strike him as unusual.

His heart beat so fast as to threaten to suffocate him, as he found, upon a more continued observation, that his fancy had not misled him.

Yet he could scarcely credit the evidence of his senses.

He took a few steps forward, then paused and listened.

Again he advanced, and this time he touched the door.

He seized hold of it with both hands, and pulled it towards him.

To his astonishment, it yielded.

How or why this could be he was at a loss to imagine.

Clearly his hated foe had remained there so long without sleep that he had lost the proper use of his faculties, and had forgotten to fasten the door after closing it for the last time.

Where was he now?

Mr. Noakes pulled the door a little further open and peeped out into the corridor.

All was in intense darkness.

There was not even a distant oil-lamp glimmering and making the darkness visible.

He could hear nothing—see nothing.

Trembling between hope and fear, scarcely daring to believe that what he beheld was true, fancying that he must be a victim to some vision, Mr. Noakes stepped out into the corridor.

He drew a long breath and extended his arms.

Already, as it seemed to him, he was free—that is to say, in comparison to what he had been.

And now it must be borne in mind that, being in such a position as this, Mr. Noakes had a much better chance of making his escape than perhaps any other person possibly could.

He had been connected with the prison of Newgate for very many years, and in the mere exercise of his duty had become thoroughly familiar with every part of it.

He knew precisely where this passage led—he knew precisely which was the nearest way to the street, and not only that—he could tell which one would offer the fewest obstructions to his progress.

After awhile he calmed himself, and as the conviction gradually settled in his mind that there was no mistake about the matter—that by some extraordinary negligence his gaoler had omitted to secure the door—Mr. Noakes grew calmer and calmer, and recovered much of his self-possession.

"I will make one desperate effort for freedom!" he

said, in a faint whisper. "If I fail, the worst consequences that can meet me is death, and that will be my fate if I remain sitting quietly in my dungeon until to-morrow morning."

It will be seen that Mr. Noakes had everything to hope and nothing to lose by this attempt.

Having made up his mind in which direction he should go, he crept as silently as a shadow along the corridor.

Before going far, he paused before a door.

He knew that it was there, and he wondered whether it would be secured in such a way that he could not force it open.

He was half afraid to make the trial, but he was agreeably surprised to discover that it was only secured by means of an iron bar and a couple of bolts shot into their sockets.

These fastenings he quickly undid, and again he glided through the portal.

As a matter of course, the more success he met with the greater did his elation become.

His step lost much of its shrinking timidity.

He strode through the passages swiftly and boldly.

All the doors he came to he was able to open with little trouble.

"Things were different," he thought, "when I was governor here. Then it would not have been possible for a prisoner to have taken the route that I have taken to-night. But they have made fresh regulations, and they turn out to be most advantageous to myself."

This time Mr. Noakes really and truly indulged in the belief that he should be able to emerge into the street unobserved, and certainly the success that he had already met with was sufficient to induce some such belief in his mind.

Presently he paused before a door that he knew communicated with the lobby or vestibule of Newgate.

This door had a grating in it near its upper portion, and Mr. Noakes peeped through the iron bars to reconnoitre before he attempted to undo any fastenings.

Profound darkness was beyond.

He strained his eyes in a vain endeavour to pierce the obscurity.

He listened with an intentness that cannot be conceived, but he failed to hear even the slightest sound.

Not even a deep or long-drawn breath reached him.

"This is most singular and unusual," he thought. "Fortune is indeed in my favour! Surely upon no other night than this could such a condition of things as this have existed."

It was clear the men were not doing their duty.

By right they should have been seated in that very lobby which he saw to be vacant, or, at any rate, in the keeper's room adjoining it.

This keeper's room, however, was, like the vestibule, plunged in perfect darkness.

At the outer door, too, which was just opposite to him, the man on the look ought to have been stationed.

But Mr. Noakes did not believe he was there.

While he stood gazing through the grating, the cool night air made its way from the street, and blew upon his face.

The coolness was refreshing and grateful to him.

It revived his courage and his spirits wonderfully.

One bold effort only had to be made.

A trifle he would have considered it when he first sat in his cell thinking of making an escape.

He had but to unfasten the door, cross the lobby, open the outer door, and rush down the steps into the street.

With trembling, nervous fingers, he set about his task.

One by one the bolts were withdrawn, the chains released, the bars put down.

He was careful not to make a sound in all this, for he could not tell whether any unusual noise might not attract attention.

At length the door was open.

He passed through, and found himself standing in the lobby.

He shivered.

A strange, shuddering sensation came over him—a sensation that he had never before experienced, but one that

seemed to tell him plainly enough that he was not alone.

It was not likely, however, that he would hold back for such a fancy as this.

One door, and one door only, intervened between himself and freedom.

That door he knew full well was fastened on the inner side, and he did not doubt that with very little trouble he should be enabled to remove them one by one, as he had all the others.

He hurried forward, and shivered again, for the conviction once more crossed him that some one else was near.

He tried to think the notion was absurd, and certainly the feeling vanished from his mind when he placed his hand upon one of the bolts of the outer door.

Nervously and timidly he drew it back.

Then the other followed.

There was an iron bar, and that, too, he lifted down with ease and silence, for he was well acquainted with the manner in which it was lodged in the two staples at each side of the door-post.

Only the lock remained.

He passed his hand over it, and this time his heart sank, for he fancied—nay, felt quite sure—that this lock would be a most serious obstacle.

It was strong and well made—how could he hope to force back the bolt?

But a shriek of pleasure almost escaped his lips—he could scarcely avoid giving vent to his exultation, for, wonderful and extraordinary fact, the key was sticking in the lock!

He seized it, grasped it tightly, and the revulsion of feeling that this sudden discovery caused made him unable for a few seconds to exert his strength sufficiently to turn it round.

At last the key began to move.

Another second, and the door would be open, and he should be in the street.

But just then a low and triumphant laugh reached his ears.

At the same instant he felt himself seized by some one, and a voice that he knew too well said:

"Aha, Mr. Noakes! Did you really think that we should let you go? I have had some rare sport with you! How do you find yourself now?"

CHAPTER DCLXVI.

MR. NOAKES COMMENCES HIS JOURNEY TO TYBURN.

SUDDENLY the dark vestibule was illuminated.

Where the light came from Mr. Noakes could hardly tell, his intellects were in so confused a condition.

Certain it is, however, that many lights were there, and all the turnkeys and warders of the prison clustered round him.

The man who had spoken was the one who had solicited the duty of keeping watch at the door of his cell.

All were standing laughing and enjoying to the utmost the consternation and despair that were visible upon the prisoner's countenance.

The whole thing had been planned by the men as being a means by which they could revenge themselves upon their former master.

Of course any act of open violence would have brought with it a severe punishment; but in this case nothing could be said, for all that they had done was their duty—they had intercepted the prisoner in his efforts to escape.

According to a plan which these very men had devised, the door of the cell was left unfastened.

They guessed which would be the route the Governor would take, and were careful that all the doors should be left so that he could open them without much trouble.

They waited for him in darkness in the little room adjoining the vestibule—that is to say, all but the man who owed Noakes such a grudge, and he was standing in the corridor at the time when the prisoner first emerged from the cell.

He was careful not to make any movement to disclose himself, and followed noiselessly in Noakes's steps.

His heart thrilled with joy and exultation when he thought what must be the feelings of his foe.

Hope was continually rising in his mind, and when, at the last moment, he believed his escape was accomplished, the disappointment he would experience upon being recaptured was almost enough to satisfy this man's craving for revenge.

"No, Mr. Noakes," he said, "we don't let you go quite so easy! I ask you again, how do you feel now? Not very comfortable, I should think—not half so comfortable as you were a few minutes ago! What a fool you must have been to have allowed yourself to be taken in in such a manner—you might have known that there was some trick in it!"

But Mr. Noakes was too crushed and too humbled to make any reply.

The full apprehension of all that had been done burst upon him at once.

The shock was terrible.

He groaned aloud in the bitterness of his anguish, and looked beseechingly and imploringly into the countenances of the turnkeys.

"Let me go," he said—"oh, pray let me go! You see what a poor miserable wretch I am, and yet I wish to live! My death can do none of you any good! Let me go—let me escape!"

"Don't you wish you may get it?" said the man who held him firm in his clutch. "You don't leave this place until to-morrow morning, and then we are all so very considerate that it has been arranged you shall ride in a handsome vehicle instead of being troubled to walk. There, now, what do you think of that?"

The man's manner, more than the words he uttered, angered Mr. Noakes, and with a sudden yell of fury, he shook off the feeling of despondency that weighed him down—he became, in fact, more like a maniac that ought else, and struggled furiously to get free.

But he might as well have tried to make a breach through the walls of Newgate by dashing his body against them.

The man's grasp could not be shaken off.

"Come on," he said—"none of your nonsense! Back to the cell you go, and there stop until the morning; then you shall take your departure for good!"

In spite of the frantic resistance that he made, Mr. Noakes was dragged along the corridors of the prison by the turnkeys—along those corridors that he a short time back had traversed so anxiously, and with the belief strong in his mind that he was making his escape.

With extreme violence he was flung into his cell and the door closed.

He was then beside himself with rage and disappointment.

He gnashed his teeth, and tore his hair, and struck his head furiously against the stone walls in the bitterness of his mortification.

And so, in the most miserable manner that could possibly be conceived, the whole of that night passed away, and morning came.

Breakfast was brought in by one of the turnkeys.

What a mockery it seemed to offer him food at such a time as that!

The prisoner turned aside in unutterable loathing.

He could not eat—he could not do anything but bewail and bemoan his lamentable fate.

All that violence of manner that had characterised him during part of the preceding night entirely vanished, and left behind a dull, apathetic condition.

He seemed only to be half conscious of what was taking place around him.

When the sheriffs paid their customary visit to the cell, he stared at them as though he did not understand the meaning of the ceremony.

But he was observed to shudder from head to foot, and this was because he had caught sight of the hangman.

That dread functionary had accompanied the sheriffs to the cell, and stood with them outside the door.

In his hand he carried a quantity of rope.

After the first shudder, Mr. Noakes kept his eyes constantly riveted upon him.

It was as though there was a kind of fascination in his every movement.

All the formalities that had to be gone through were disagreeably familiar to the condemned man.

The prisoner was handed over to the sheriffs by the Governor of the prison, and then the whole party were conducted to the yard, where the ceremony of binding the prisoner was gone through.

His arms were here securely pinioned behind his back.

Resistance now was out of the question.

But Mr. Noakes had not the heart to attempt to make it.

The cart was waiting in the court-yard, with the coffin lying in it into which his body would be put when it had hung the appointed time from the gallows.

The sight of this object tried Mr. Noakes's nerves perhaps more than anything else.

He could not bear to look upon the dull, black, rudely-made coffin, with its white, ghastly-looking nails.

He was assisted into the cart, and as there was no other seat, he was compelled to sit down upon the coffin.

The Ordinary, with an open prayer-book in his hand, placed himself by his side.

The hangman mounted to the front of the cart, and took hold of the reins.

All was ready for the start.

The large folding doors were flung open, and then a terrific roaring sound made Mr. Noakes glance hurriedly in the direction from which it came.

He was able to see out into the Old Bailey, and as far as ever his eye could reach nothing but human faces met his view.

They were roaring and shouting simply because they knew the much-hated prisoner was about to be brought forth.

A close guard was kept round the vehicle, for such was the state of the public mind that the authorities fancied that they would be inclined to take the law into their own hands and inflict summary justice upon the prisoner.

Slowly the procession moved forward.

They passed through the gates, and the officers who rode in front were compelled to force a way through the crowd with their cutlasses.

And every step of the way the street was thronged with spectators, who, as soon as they caught sight of the prisoner, set up loud yells of derision.

But by this time Mr. Noakes was completely overcome.

In a dull, stupefied, abject manner he sat upon the coffin, taking no notice of the shoutings of the crowd, and paying no attention to the droning, humming noise that was produced by the Ordinary reading the service for the burial of the dead.

CHAPTER DCLXVII.

MR. NOAKES SUFFERS THE EXTREME PENALTY OF THE LAW AT TYBURN.

As the procession moved slowly on its way, its progress became more and more difficult.

The nearer they got to Tyburn, the closer they found the people packed together, so that it was almost an impossibility for them to force a passage at all.

Every now and then a complete stoppage would take place.

At these times the groans and yells of the populace would be something dreadful to listen to.

Nor did they confine themselves to vocal manifestations of their abhorrence.

Various missiles were thrown from all parts of the throng, and some of them were exceedingly dangerous, so that not only Mr. Noakes, but the Ordinary and the hangman had some very narrow escapes of their lives.

A large piece of brick came down with great force upon the Ordinary's prayer-book, and knocked it from his hands.

He stooped, as Noakes thought, to pick it up again.

But instead of doing so he crouched down in the cart as low as he could get, so as to be out of the reach of any other missile.

Mr. Noakes's apathy increased.

When the various fragments of all kinds of material were being hurled about him he did not flinch in the least.

Although the distance could not have exceeded three miles at the most, yet it positively took the cart three hours to perform the journey.

By the time they arrived in sight of the triple tree the hour of noon was almost at hand.

Noakes knew that the gallows was visible, not because he raised his head and saw it himself, but because of the shouts and yells of the crowd.

It was a glorious day.

The sun was within a short distance of the meridian, and pouring down his rays with full force and power.

In the sky there was not a single cloud.

To look upwards or anywhere above the mass of seething people round the cart, all was beautiful and summer-like.

At last the cart stopped.

The shadow of the old timbers fell upon Mr. Noakes, and he knew at once where he was.

The police, with their drawn cutlasses, formed a firm barrier all around, and managed to keep off the people tolerably well.

No more stones were thrown now.

There was scarcely any shouting.

But all were pressing forward to one point, all being anxious to obtain to best view that they possibly could.

They looked with straining eyes upon the figures in the cart.

They would have considered themselves cheated had they failed to notice one single movement that was made.

Finding the storm of missiles was over, the Ordinary ventured to rise up from his undignified position.

But he had by no means recovered his agitation.

He picked up the prayer-book, and, all unconscious that he was holding it upside-down, commenced to mumble the prayers that by continual reading he had got off by rote.

Then the sheriffs gave the body of the prisoner into the charge of the hangman.

He stood up in the cart, with a piece of rope in his hand, and with some degree of skill threw it over one of the cross-beams above.

Then, drawing down the end, he tied a running knot, and finally drew the rope tight.

He tested its strength by hanging upon it with both hands for several moments, and while he did this, another terrific yell burst from the crowd.

It subsided, however, as soon as they saw the hangman and the Ordinary lead the wretched-looking culprit beneath the beam.

The white cap was next drawn down so as to cover his features.

The rope was tied in a noose round his neck, and then the preparations were complete.

A deep, hushed silence now fell upon the whole multitude.

Had they been suddenly transformed into stone they could not have been more silent or more immovable.

It was strange to see so many thousand eyes all directed to one point, and one alone, bending upon it a fixed, unwinking gaze.

Clumsily and heavily the hangman descended from the cart.

The Ordinary got down too.

Flourishing his whip, the hangman walked up to the horse's head, and took hold of the bridle.

He gave him several sharp cuts that caused the animal to move forward rapidly.

Mr. Noakes could feel the bottom of the cart slipping from beneath his feet—the only thing that intervened between himself and death.

At that last awful moment, the desire to prolong his life came over him more strongly and more forcibly than it had ever done before.

But he was perfectly helpless.

The rope was round his neck.

His arms were so tightly pinioned with cord that the pain was almost unendurable.

He struggled frantically, and made many vain and desperate attempts to seize hold of the bottom of the cart with his feet, and prevent the rough planking from being drawn underneath him.

But all in vain.

The people observed his struggles.

They knew what he was trying to do, and they cheered.

Mr. Noakes, although so near to death, heard that cheer, and wondered what it meant.

The wild hope darted into his mind that it must be the token of a reprieve having arrived, and therefore his struggles to maintain his footing became a thousand times more violent than before.

Then suddenly his feet encountered vacancy.

He dropped down.

He stopped with a sudden jerk, and that jerk was echoed by a strange sound from the mob—a sound produced by some thousands of breaths being drawn in at the same instant.

That was the end—all was over.

For several minutes longer did the wretched prisoner's useless struggles continue.

The mode of execution was very different then to what it is at the present time.

Mr. Noakes had to die by the slow process of strangulation.

Intently the crowd watched him.

But by degrees his convulsive movements subsided.

He would be calm for a second, then there would be the spasmodic movement of a limb, until finally all was still.

The body hung there, suspended by the rope, an inert mass, and possessing no movement except a slight rotatory one that was probably communicated to it by the wind.

To and fro it swung, like accursed fruit on a hideous tree.

Long did the people continue to gaze upon all that there was left of Mr. Noakes.

Some after a time moved away and turned their steps homeward.

But the majority waited to see the body cut down.

This ceremony did not take place for an hour, and during that hour the scene that took place round the gallows baffles all description.

Punctually to the moment the hangman again appeared upon the cart.

He was now inclined to take matters perfectly easy.

He had a short pipe in his mouth that he was smoking energetically.

He backed his horse so that the cart was once more under the body.

He climbed up with an open knife in his hand, and by several strokes cut through the rope.

He was quite inclined to save himself all the trouble he could, was that hangman, and so he had taken the precaution to place the coffin in the cart in such a position that as soon as the rope was severed the dead body would fall into it.

It did so, and although it did not fall quite into its proper position, that was after all, to his thinking, quite an indifferent matter.

It was not likely that they could expect him to be very particular with such a dead body, so he stuffed in the limbs as well as he could, placed the lid upon the top, and drove leisurely back to London with his hideous load.

And so that was the end of Mr. Noakes.

He was buried—not in the prison, as malefactors usually are at the present day, but cast into a roughly-dug hole in one of the London churchyards.

CHAPTER DCLXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD BELIEVES THAT HE SEES AN APPARITION. WE return now to Jonathan Wild, whose position was scarcely less critical and miserable than that of his companion, Mr. Noakes.

The man who came to the door of the farm-house in answer to his appeals for food looked at the applicant with a distrustful eye.

There was everything in his appearance that was repulsive, and he made up his mind that no such man should stand beneath his roof.

But he could relieve his present necessities.

He did not wish any man, no matter how bad, to die upon his threshold, so some food and drink were placed before Jonathan.

He ate ravenously, and when he had concluded his meal he rose up with the intention of continuing his journey.

But so far from feeling thankful to the people at the farm-house for what they had given him, he only shook his fist in impotent rage, and breathed out horrible curses upon them for not having treated him in a better manner.

"I should like to slay them all!" he growled between his teeth. "If I could see them weltering in their blood I should be more content!"

He walked hastily over the dark fields; he knew that it would be unwise for him to remain long in one place, for he doubted not that the police would make close search after him.

He felt wonderfully refreshed and strengthened by the meal he had partaken of, and determined if possible to push on with all speed during the night, and then secrete himself while daylight lasted.

Why it was he could not tell, but certain it is some inward impulse urged him to turn his face in the direction of London.

Accordingly he did so, though at the rate he was travelling it would take him a long time to reach the metropolis.

Whether he had any deeply-laid scheme in his mind we shall shortly see.

It is more than probable, however, that he had some object in view, and that he did not take this course without some good reason.

The clouds that had covered the sky gradually rolled away, and the moon shone down with great brightness and power—too much brightness to please Wild.

He wished to have the deepest darkness as his companion.

In order to guard against being seen, he took care to keep himself concealed behind the shadow of the hedge-rows.

And in this manner he proceeded for a long time, for the most part skirting the highway as he went.

All around him was very still and very silent.

He was in a lonely part of the country.

There were few travellers to be seen, even in the day-time, and very rarely one at night, so Jonathan need not have been so much alarmed as he was about being seen—though it is scarcely possible for anyone in his position to be too careful and cautious in his movements.

He walked on until his strength would carry him no further without a rest, and so he flung himself down at full length upon the grass.

There he lay meditating for a long time, turning over in his mind all manner of schemes.

"I will live!" he muttered, at last—"I will live with one object and one object only—and that object shall be revenge! After I have glutted that, I care not what becomes of me! Revenge I must and will have; and until I have fully satisfied this passion I cannot, must not die! But when all is done, if they seize me in the very hour of triumph, I shall not care! Yes—I will live for revenge only!"

The mere thought that he might be able to wreak some personal injury upon those he looked upon as his enemies had a wonderful effect upon Jonathan's bodily powers.

He rose up to his feet, and stood as though undecided as to the direction in which he should turn his steps.

"I must not forget," he said, "money will be requisite to me. I must have money to carry out my plan. When I have got that, I shall be able to overcome many difficulties that would be insuperable without it—besides, at the present moment I have not a fraction, and I must not expect to live upon charity."

He paused again, and then he spoke with resolution.

"I will make my way direct to the spot where the miser's gold was buried. I will unearth as much of it as I think my wants will require. Yes, that will be the easiest, the quickest, the best, and the safest plan for obtaining what I need. Now that my mind is made up, all will be easy enough."

It required some amount of skill to be able to decide which way to go in order to reach the spot where the gold had been buried.

After a time, however, Jonathan felt confident that he knew his way, and struck boldly across the fields in a north-westerly direction.

He did not pause again until he reached a very high and thickly-planted hedge.

To have surmounted it would have been totally impossible, and before taking any further proceedings, he climbed up the bank on which it was planted, and endeavoured to ascertain what was beyond.

To his surprise he found it to be a broad high-road, and this discovery set him thinking.

He was at a loss to know what road it could possibly be.

While meditating upon this point, he suddenly heard the sound of a horse's feet in the distance.

"Some one approaches," he said—"I will wait till they go by. Whoever it is, it matters not to me in the least—not in the least!"

Jonathan was much exhausted, and so, instead of waiting at the hedge to watch for the approaching travellers, he once more flung himself down on the grass to rest.

So great was his weariness that he must have fallen off into a kind of slumber, for he no longer heard the sound of the horses' feet, and he forgot all about the travellers that he heard coming.

Suddenly, however, he started up.

He listened, and he fancied he could detect a murmuring of voices.

The sound appeared to grow louder and louder—not that it did so in reality, but the effect was produced by Jonathan Wild recovering better possession of his senses.

The voices came from the road, and so, stealthily as a snake, he climbed up the bank again, and peeped between the stems of the hedgerow.

The high-road before him was plainly visible.

The moon shone so brightly that it rivalled the daylight.

Jonathan's face assumed a strange, hideous, convulsed appearance.

His eyes almost started from their sockets—so astonished was he at what he beheld that he could not move hand or foot.

Seated on the back of a magnificent horse, and at no great distance from him, was a face and form he knew full well.

He could not doubt it—it was impossible to be mistaken.

It was one of his foes—a foe that he fully and entirely believed had been long ago disposed of—a foe whose remains had almost resolved themselves into the elements of which they had been composed.

The person he saw sitting on the back of the horse, and revealed by the light of the moon shining with full force upon him, was no other than Jack Sheppard.

It was impossible to mistake the peculiar features—Jonathan knew him too well.

In that silvery light Jack had a strange, ghastly-looking aspect.

To Jonathan Wild the impression was firm in his mind that what he beheld was nothing more than a spectre.

What could Jack Sheppard's presence mean?

More and more did he strain his eyes, being impelled to do so by a horrible fascination.

And then he felt quite sure that he could see round the spectre's neck a dark-blue, livid mark, such as would be left by the pressure of the hangman's rope.

The spectre, too, was evidently gazing full upon the spot where Jonathan Wild was concealed.

How gladly would he have fled from that spot there and then!

But the power of motion was denied to him.

Then he saw the figure slowly raise its arm and point at the hedge.

More he did not see, for at that moment his senses forsook him utterly.

The grasp which he had taken of the long tufts of grass at the top of the embankment relaxed, and he slipped gently down into the field, where he lay as immovable as though dead.

CHAPTER DCLXIX.

JONATHAN WILD RECOVERS FROM HIS SWOON, AND RESOLVES TO TAKE POSSESSION OF A HORSE.

How long Jonathan remained lying there upon the grass he had no idea.

It was only by very slow degrees that he recovered his consciousness, and when at length he was sensible enough to sit upright and look about him, he saw that the moon, which when he saw it last was high in the heavens, was now almost on the point of setting behind a distant hill.

His insensibility must, then, have endured for a considerable period.

As recollection slowly came back to him, Jonathan shuddered and trembled from head to foot.

Cold drops of perspiration, wrung from him by intense fear, started out upon his forehead.

He moved his lips uneasily, and tried to gain his feet.

"It was a spectre!" he said—"yes, surely a spectre—a visitant from another world! And yet, how like—how like! I could have sworn Jack Sheppard, alive and in the flesh, stood before me; but it cannot be—it is impossible—he is dead! Did I not see him myself suspended from Tyburn Tree? Did he not hang the allotted time? and was he not then cut down? Yes, yes—I know all about that—he is dead!"

More alarmed than ever, Jonathan continued his efforts to assume a standing posture.

At length he succeeded.

"What can it mean?" he said. "Why am I troubled with this express visitation from the grave? What can the spirit of Jack Sheppard portend to me? No good, surely, for in life he was ever my bane and my curse!"

Just then the impulse irresistibly came over him to climb up the little embankment once more, and again take a peep through the hedge.

He did so, although his trembling limbs almost failed him.

He peered into the roadway.

No longer was it brilliantly illuminated, as it had been on the previous occasion.

Yet, although dim and obscure, he could see about him tolerably well.

Of the spectre—for such he considered it—not a trace was to be seen.

It had vanished wholly—entirely vanished—vanished as completely as though it had never been there.

Then Jonathan began to ask himself whether he had not allowed his fancy to mislead him—whether he had not been deluded by a freak of the imagination.

But he could not take upon himself to say that this was actually the case.

He was tormented by horrible doubts and fears.

"Does it show that my end is near?" he exclaimed—"is it some foretoken of my fate—some warning to show me that ere long I shall share his fate? I cannot think that—I will not think that! I will go on as before—bravely and defiantly!"

These words will show that there was still left in the breast of Jonathan Wild some portion of his former fears and turbulent spirit.

But in spite of his bravado, and the manner in which he attempted to carry off this affair, it nevertheless gave him a severe shock, and it was long before he could recover from the effects of it.

But, as the reader knows full well, he was terrifying himself quite unnecessarily.

It was no spectre that he had seen, although his own guilty fears made him imagine that it was.

It was Jack Sheppard himself that he had seen—Jack Sheppard in company with Blueskin, who, happening to be some little distance in the rear, was not perceived.

In the prosecution of their enterprise against their joint enemy, they had managed to reach so far.

Little by little—step by step—they had followed him up, becoming acquainted one after the other with all the deeds of crime and violence which marked almost every step of his career.

Of the capture of Wild and Noakes by the police officers they knew nothing.

The last information they received was that the two

villains were proceeding in the direction of the sea-coast.

And this was the destination Blueskin and Jack Sheppard had in view.

The pausing of Jack at that identical spot was purely a matter of accident.

His horse was much fleetier than that bestrode by Blueskin, and he had pulled up in order to wait for his friend to place himself by his side.

Could but some invisible being have whispered in his ear the astounding intelligence that his arch enemy was within a few feet of him at that very moment—that, in fact, he was lying helpless and insensible upon the grass on the other side of the hedge—how welcome that intelligence would have been received!

But it was not to be.

There was no invisible power to furnish this information, and by his own faculties there was no possibility of Jack Sheppard discovering it.

Accordingly, when his companion placed himself by his side, they resumed their journey at a steady pace, leaving the object of their pursuit behind them.

And there, as we have seen, Jonathan Wild remained until of his own self he recovered his senses.

All around continued as profoundly silent as before, and therefore he summoned up his courage to quit his hiding-place and emerge into the high-road.

His resolution remained unchanged, and, having satisfied himself as to his position, he continued his course in the direction that he believed would bring him to the spot where the miser's money had been concealed.

With this amount of wealth in his possession, he would no doubt be able to accomplish much.

Whether he would succeed in obtaining it or not remains to be seen.

But before he could cross the high-road another sound broke upon his ears—a sound similar to that which he had heard some time before.

A traveller was approaching along the high-road, and approaching at a rapid rate.

With an effort, Wild shook off all his superstitious fears. He was excessively tired and weary.

The distance he had to go was great, and he immediately bethought himself of what a difference it would make to him in every respect if he could but obtain possession of a horse.

The man who was coming, whoever he might be, certainly possessed one, and Jonathan Wild was not the man to make any scruple about possessing himself of it.

Unfortunately he possessed no weapon.

The police officers had been careful to deprive him of both arms and ammunition.

But in a matter of this kind Jonathan Wild was not likely to remain long at fault.

Close to his feet was a large round stone.

He seized it with a cry of delight, for he believed that he should be able to throw it with sufficient accuracy of aim to disable the traveller, and compel him to come to a standstill.

Concealed in the shadow of the hedge, he stood quite still awaiting him.

The stone was poised in his hand ready to be thrown at a moment's notice.

Unsuspectingly the traveller came on.

His horse was going at an easy pace, and this fact made it all the more probable that Jonathan Wild would succeed in his intention.

Another moment and the dark figure of a man seated upon a steed came in sight.

Jonathan was ready.

With a howl that was enough to terrify anyone, no matter how stout their nerves might be, he flung the stone with the full force of his arm.

There was a dull thud, followed by a loud cry of pain.

The stone had done its work successfully.

The traveller fell sideways off his horse on to the high-road.

No sooner had he cast the stone than, anticipating that the aim would be successful, he darted forward with great suddenness, in order to prevent the horse from galloping away.

He was successful, for he seized him by the bridle and hung on tightly.

The terrified steed plunged and kicked in a furious manner, but all to no purpose.

Jonathan had him secure.

The traveller groaned faintly.

One foot was tangled in the stirrup, so that had the horse galloped away, his fate would have been a fearful one.

Having succeeded to some extent in quieting the horse, Jonathan slipped the rein over his arm, and then removed the traveller's foot from the stirrup.

Such a favourable opportunity of possessing himself of a little booty, perhaps, in the shape of fire-arms and ammunition, could not be resisted.

So, in spite of the feeble opposition made by the traveller, Jonathan quickly rifled his pockets.

By the time he had succeeded in this operation, the traveller swooned.

The stone had struck him upon the head, and it was something to be wondered at that immediate death was not produced.

"I had better dispose of him," Wild muttered; "it's no good leaving him here on the highway to be discovered by the next traveller; I'll put him out of sight."

About doing this there was no great difficulty.

There was one plan that Jonathan had adopted more than once, and he always found it answered his purpose most admirably.

This was to roll the body over into one of the ditches by the roadside, and there allow it to remain.

Generally these ditches were overgrown with long, rank grass, so that it was impossible to see whether they contained water or not.

In such a place as this a body might remain for a great length of time undiscovered.

In a brutal and ferocious manner he kicked and rolled the traveller over the road, until finally, with a loud splash, he fell into the water.

"Lie there and rot!" said Wild—"lie there and rot!"

By this adventure Jonathan had gained not only a steed of average quality, but also a couple of pistols and a small supply of ammunition.

The next thing he did was to mount the horse; and as he seated himself in the saddle, Jonathan felt such an amount of triumph and exultation, that he could scarcely resist breathing aloud a defiance to his foes, although there were none of them near to hear him.

But his thoughts suddenly took a fresh turn, for, to his surprise, he heard the sound of another traveller approaching.

He listened for a moment or so in indecision.

The success he had hitherto met with made him bold.

As he had succeeded with this first traveller, why not lay wait for the second, and treat him in a similar fashion.

Circumstances might arise to make it difficult or impossible to reach the spot where the gold was buried, and there was just the chance as well that the secret hoard had been discovered, or that Mr. Noakes had confessed it to some of his foes.

Surely it would be better to make sure of money now, and as he made this reflection Jonathan backed his horse into the shadow of the hedge, and resolved to wait for the traveller to make his appearance.

On he came at a rather rapid rate.

Just when he was about a couple of hundred yards from where Jonathan was in ambush, this traveller touched the horse with the spurs, and increased the rate considerably.

He shot past Jonathan Wild almost before he was aware of it, and certainly before he could carry out his intention of stopping him.

Something else astonished Jonathan too, and this was the transient glimpse he caught of the traveller's countenance.

He uttered a loud cry—an angry shout.

CHAPTER DCLXX.

JONATHAN WILD MEETS UNEXPECTEDLY WITH AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

JONATHAN WILD had fully prepared himself for all he had to do.



[JONATHAN WILD IN PURSUIT OF HIS SON GEORGE.]

It echoed far and wide over the silent fields, and caused the horseman to look back in great surprise.

The horse on which he was riding, terrified by the sound, broke into a mad gallop.

"By all that's damnable," Jonathan cried, "that's George! How fortunate! I will have the villain's life! But how comes it that he is here? I should have thought that he would not have ventured back to England with his money!"

He struck his horse violently in the flanks with his heels while he spoke, and immediately set off in pursuit of the horseman who had passed by.

It was indeed no other than his son George.

The meaning of his presence there was simple enough.

In carrying out his plans, Steggs had laid information against Wild junior for the share he had in persecuting Edgworth Bess, and every effort was made to capture him.

No. 143.—BLUESKIN.

George was not long in discovering that the police officers were at his back.

For what precise purpose he could not tell; it was sufficient for him to know that they were endeavouring to capture him.

He deemed it expedient to leave London without delay; and so, mounting his horse and separating himself from Nicholson, who would be of no further service to him, he made his way into the heart of the country.

There was in his mind a dim kind of idea of doing some terrible and startling deed, and then gaining some quiet seaport and taking leave of England.

Upon thus unexpectedly catching sight of the being who had caused him so much loss and inconvenience during the whole course of his life, well might Jonathan Wild become suddenly a prey to all those violent and angry passions that were so easily roused up in his breast.

Entirely carried away by these feelings, he urged his horse forward at the very top of its speed.

But it was long indeed before he was successful in gaining in the least upon the object of his pursuit.

George Wild had heard the shout, and naturally guessed that it came from the throat of some police officer who had recognised him.

Therefore, when his horse broke out into that furious gallop he made no effort to restrain him, but, on the contrary, touched him occasionally with the spurs, lest he should flag.

It was likely to be a long race, for George had got a good start.

But Jonathan's whole mind was bent upon overtaking his ungrateful son.

Was it not most important that he should do so? Would there not be an opportunity of recovering at least some portion of the large fortune he had accumulated by many years of successful villany, and which had been wrested from him at the last moment?

In fact, it was not so much his son George that Jonathan saw before him as it was the glorious sum of twenty-five thousand pounds.

In his present mood he felt that he would gladly expend every fraction of that large sum if by doing so he could purchase the revenge he so longed for.

The most awful curses came from his lips when he found himself unable to make such rapid progress as he would have wished.

The manner in which he treated his willing steed was barbarous to a degree.

Away—away they went, keeping all the time in the high-road, and going away from London instead of towards it as Jonathan had a little while before proposed.

Soon, however, he was encouraged to redouble his exertions, for he found that slowly and surely he was gaining upon the fugitive.

George Wild observed this too, and at the same time made the discovery that he was pursued by one man only.

"May I be d—d," was his inward thought, "if I gallop away any longer from a single man! If I don't give him his reward, d—n me!"

George uttered these words half aloud and half to himself.

But they were spoken in a tone of great resolution, and no sooner had he come to this conclusion than he checked his horse abruptly, and wheeled round so as to face his foe.

On came Jonathan like a whirlwind.

He was not surprised that George should adopt this course; he wondered why he had not paused earlier.

CHAPTER DCLXXI.

WILD JUNIOR ASTONISHES THE GUV'NOR BY HIS COOLNESS.

VERY calmly and quietly did Wild junior wait for his father to approach, though it must be stated that at that time he had not the least notion that he was pursued by anyone else save a police officer.

He held his hand as it seemed in a negligent manner by his side.

But it was a treacherous act.

In that hand he grasped a pistol on which he knew he could rely.

He waited until his foe should come near enough.

And now it happened that what little light still came from the moon fell upon George's countenance, and consequently upon Jonathan's back.

His features were, therefore, by no means plainly distinguished, and he had altered so greatly in consequence of the rough life he had led for so long, that it would be difficult indeed to recognise him at a first glance.

Suddenly George Wild raised his arm and fired.

There was a loud report, and Jonathan's hat flew off his head, and was carried over the hedgerow into a meadow.

Undeterred by this reception, he galloped on, nor did he pause until he was side by side with his son.

Then leaning forward in the saddle, he seized him tightly by the throat and shook him backwards and forwards.

So tightly did he press his fingers upon his son's wind-pipe that it deprived him not only of speech but of motion.

"Villain! wretch!" shrieked Wild, mad with fury. "I have caught you at last! Now there shall be a reckoning and a settlement in full between us! Curse you, I have half a mind to strangle you now, and would do so only I require some information from you! Promise to give it, or this moment shall be your last!"

George Wild could not speak, but he nodded his head violently to imply his consent.

Jonathan relaxed his hold, but took the precaution to seize the reins of his son's horse.

George Wild gasped fearfully for breath, and tried in vain to speak.

Several moments elapsed before an articulate sound came from his lips.

The first words that he ejaculated were:

"Well, I'll be d—d!"

That was all he said, and having so spoken, he sat upon the back of his horse looking at Jonathan with a comical expression of surprise.

"I wish you had been d—d a thousand times before I had seen you!" roared Wild. "But I have you now, and you shall not escape!"

"I don't mean now, guv'nor. I'm glad I've found you, for I intend to stick to you like a blessed brick!"

The impudence of this assertion, given under such circumstances, was so great that Jonathan Wild was for a moment struck dumb with astonishment.

"No, guv'nor," continued Wild junior—"I'm glad we've met; it will be a good thing for you and a good thing for me, for we've always managed to work well together yet."

"Yes, curse you! You come to me at the time of my success, and having learned where my wealth was, had secretly obtained it, and then departed until all was spent."

"That's about it, guv'nor. We're the right sort to be partners, and no mistake—you get the money, and I spend it. That brings things to a level."

"I will not listen to your foolery now," said Jonathan, wrothly. "We have met, and I will take care that you don't again quit my side—"

"Glad to hear it, guv'nor, because that shows that in this matter we are both of one mind!"

"I say," screamed Wild, at the top of his voice, "that you shall not leave me until you have told me what you have done with the twenty-five thousand pounds that you drew out of the bank!"

"Oh, d—n it!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, I made a fool of myself."

"How?" said Wild. "Explain yourself. It is necessary now that I should have the use of that money."

"Is it, though?" said George, with perfect calmness.

"Then I tell you what it is, guv'nor, you won't get the use of any of it—not so much as a d—d sixpence!"

"You—you don't mean to say," gasped Wild, "that you have spent it all?"

"Oh, no—I only wish I had!"

Jonathan breathed again.

"You have not spent it, you say?"

"No, I have not."

"Can you tell me where it is?"

"I can."

"Then—then you have been alarming me without a cause!" said Jonathan, anxiously, for he knew how much depended upon obtaining this amount of money.

"Well, you do seem to be rather excited, guv'nor; but I can't think what it's all about. Surely a matter of twenty-five thousand pounds is but a trifle to you!"

"A trifle?" screamed Wild, his voice rendered almost inarticulate with passion. "It's life—it is all the world—it is everything to me! George—George, tell me where that money is, or a considerable portion of it, and I will overlook the past—we will be friends from henceforth!"

"How affecting!" said George. "Upon my word, guv'nor, you're quite pathetic; I should not have thought you could have done it so well!"

"But you will tell me where the money is, George?"

"Oh yes—I will—I will—I have said so!"

"Then where is it?"

"Why, in a d—d lubberly steward's pocket, who found out I'd got the money with me, and quietly put me overboard one night as I was making my escape to the continent."

"What—what?" yelled Wild, for he could not believe that he had heard aright.

"Why, the short and the long of it is, guv'nor, I meant being very comfortable with that twenty-five thousand pounds, but the steward of the ship found out I'd got it, so he drugged my drink one night, took possession of my money, and then threw me overboard."

"Villain—monster—wretch—it's a lie! I'm sure it's a lie! I will not believe it! Tell me the truth at once, or you die upon the spot!"

"Just as you like, guv'nor, but I have told you the truth this time, and that's a fact. I wish it was false. If I had spent the money, I should not have cared a rap; but to be plundered of it all in a lump—Well, well—I won't say what it is, guv'nor!"

"I can't believe it," said Wild—"I can't believe it. It is some invention of yours to enable you to retain possession of my wealth."

"Oh, well!—have it your own way, guv'nor, if you like; but I can only say that's the fact, and if you will listen to me for five minutes, I will tell you all about it, and then perhaps you can judge better."

Jonathan made no reply, and so Wild junior gave a very clear and circumstantial account of how he obtained the money and how he lost it again.

There is no necessity to repeat his narrative, for all the circumstances must be fresh in the recollection of the reader.

Jonathan bent his head.

It was no longer possible to doubt.

He knew his son well, and felt confident that he was speaking the truth.

But the disappointment that the loss of this money caused him was almost more than he could bear.

"George," he said, "but for your ingratitude and villainy, I should now be able to achieve a perfect triumph over my enemies. As it is, through you I am left entirely defenceless and unprotected."

"Well, it cannot be helped, guv'nor—I am very sorry."

"Sorry? You have been the curse of my entire life! If I could have read the future, I would have put an end to your existence long ago. What could be more base and villainous than your conduct with respect to that money? If you had not lost it in the manner you have described, you would have gone abroad and spent it in reckless, riotous dissipation, never giving one thought to me."

"Now, now, guv'nor, don't pitch it quite so strong! You hurt my feelings—upon my word you do! Just look at the circumstances, and tell me whether you thought I could act any differently."

"Act any differently?" said Jonathan, stupefied with amazement.

"Yes; I am sure it was doing you a kindness—a great kindness. I thought so all the time."

"This is monstrous!"

"No. But it got wind somehow that the money was yours, and I heard of it, so I thought to myself, 'I will be beforehand with the rest—I will go and draw it out and be off,' so I did it."

"And what of me?" said Wild—"did you give one thought to me?"

"Well, the fact is, guv'nor, I hardly thought you worth one! You see, you were safe in Newgate. You had been tried and found guilty—the day of your execution was fixed. I could see no probability of your escaping your doom, so I judged it best to consult my own safety by beating a retreat while I was able to do so."

CHAPTER DCLXXII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON BEGIN TO COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

JONATHAN WILD was absolutely staggered by his son's audacity.

And well he might be, for surely it had never had a parallel.

But a feeling of the greatest despondency and grief had come over him.

He sat on his steed, gazing abstractedly upon his horse's mane without venturing to say another word.

"Now you have heard the full particulars," continued George. "I have made a clean breast of it, so what do you say to going into partnership once more?"

"Peace! Let us have no more of this folly!" answered Jonathan. "I am now in a position of the utmost danger, but wealth would have lifted me out of it. But something stays my hand, or else why do I not raise my pistol and put an end to your existence? for you have been nothing else but a curse to me all your life!"

"Now, don't be harsh, guv'nor! Think how I have fallen in with all your plans, and how I have assisted you! It's not my fault that they have failed."

"But I say it is."

"Then you are unreasonable. I can assure you I was quite rejoiced when I heard that you had cheated the hangman. It was a narrow squeak though, guv'nor, wasn't it?"

Jonathan shuddered.

He could not treat the subject as his son did.

"However, I thought we should meet sooner or later, and instead of wasting my time by galloping after you, what do you think I did?"

"I don't know."

"Can you guess?"

"No."

"Keep your courage up, guv'nor—you're not dead yet! Why, I did my best to serve you, although, perhaps, you won't believe it."

"I doubt it."

"Well, then, I tried hard to capture Edgworth Bess. I knew that it was not too late to carry out that clever scheme of yours. But, curses on her, she slipped through my fingers, nor could I again obtain possession of her!"

"And where is she now?" asked Jonathan, eagerly, for this golden dream in which he had indulged so long suddenly presented itself before him.

"Her claims have been admitted and recognised," was the reply. "She has now assumed her title, and is in full and uncontrolled possession of her estates and wealth."

"Is it so?"

"It is indeed; and what think you? That villain Steggs—you remember him?—he has brought all this about, and he made London too hot to hold me. That's how I came to be here. But I shall meet him yet, and then—"

George Wild did not finish his sentence, but the ferocious manner in which he spoke, and the abrupt manner in which he paused and clutched the butt-end of a pistol convulsively, declared his intention more plainly than any open threat could have done.

"And she has recovered possession of all, then?" murmured Wild.

"Yes; as I told you, she is now mistress of all."

Jonathan was silent.

But though his tongue was still his thoughts were busy.

He was turning the matter over in his mind, and wondering whether he could not obtain, after all, some considerable advantage.

"I know what you are thinking of, guv'nor," said Wild junior, interrupting his meditations. "Now, take my word for it, the best thing we can do is to form an alliance with each other. We shall then both be working to one end to our mutual benefit; otherwise, we shall only be acting in antagonism to each other, and then you can guess the result."

"What do you mean, George?"

"Oh, you know what I mean plain enough! We have failed so far, but that's no reason why the scheme should be given up just yet."

Wild started, for these were his own thoughts.

He had come to the selfsame conclusion.

"I have trusted you too much already," was the reply. "Henceforth we must be strangers to each other."

"No, no—guv'nor! I'll be d—d if we must! Recollect there are two words to that bargain. I tell you, for the future I mean to stick on to you like a leech. So don't try to shake me off, for you will not succeed."

"But I cannot trust you. I will not have you with me—at the last moment, I feel sure you will betray me."

"No, no, guv'nor—nothing of the sort—nothing of the sort, I can assure you!"

"But I say it is so."

"Well, have your own way, then. You were always an obstinate old fool, and I see you have not altered in that respect."

Jonathan ground his teeth, but said nothing.

"Then you are determined that we shall be foes?" said George, at length.

"I am."

"Then I am not. I see that you have not sufficiently considered the matter. You must turn it over in your mind again. I cannot take that for a reply."

"But you must—you shall take it."

"Now, look here, guv'nor. I'll tell you what I intend to do, and if you like to aid me in it, why, so much the better for both of us. In the first place, I would have you consider what objects we have each severally in view."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Give me a little attention, and you will find that I shall speak rationally enough. I have two objects to live for, and so have you. Those two objects are the same. You long for money and revenge, and so do I; and if you will join with me, guv'nor, why, d—n me, we shall have them yet!"

"Yes, yes—revenge!" said Wild, fiercely. "I will have revenge—a full, deep, bitter, and lasting revenge! Then, when I have had it, I shall not care in the least. I shall be content to die by any death, but I can't quit existence until I have had a full and deadly vengeance!"

"Now, guv'nor, look here!—if you go on in that extraordinary style we shall part at once—I can't do with it anyhow. That's just how it is that you have failed hitherto instead of being successful. Of course I can make allowances for you—you are getting old, guv'nor—you are getting old!"

"Peace, fool!"

George shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me we differ as to what a fool is. I consider myself to be particularly sensible; but don't interrupt—let me go back to the original question."

Wild was silent.

"If you will only listen, I will tell you how we can get both the things we want. First we will have money, and then revenge; or, if you like it better, both shall come together."

"What's your plan?"

"Simply this: we will wait a little while until this excitement about us calms down, and then, when the objects of our hate are completely lulled into a sense of false security, I will tell you what we will do."

"Well—well?"

"We will go to the place where Edgworth Bess may be—we shall easily be able to find that out—and, having done so, we will seize her, carry her off, and keep her securely confined until she consents to our terms."

"And what will they be?"

"There is plenty of time to consider them yet, guv'nor. But she will have almost an unlimited command of money, so we shall be able to demand our own price for the ransom."

"I see—I see!" said Wild. "It's a good thought, George—a very good thought! We will make her freedom dependent upon the ransom, and then when we have got it, George—"

"You mean the ransom?"

"Yes—when we have got it we will keep it, and we will keep her too. We will be revenged!"

"Exactly, guv'nor; but we will leave the details for a future discussion—that's my plan. I have told it to you. Have you got a better to propose?"

"I have not."

"Then what do you say to my original proposition? Shall we be partners or not?"

For several minutes Wild hesitated.

But after weighing all present and future circumstances over in his mind, he came to the conclusion that it would be better to remain in peace with his son than at war.

CHAPTER DCLXXIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON ENTER INTO AN ALLIANCE WITH EACH OTHER.

"Now, guv'nor," said Wild junior, after a pause, "is it to be a bargain—yes or no?"

"Yes, if you will swear solemnly to act fairly and justly by me."

"All right, guv'nor. I'll swear that or anything else you like. It's agreed, then, is it?"

"Yes."

"And now from henceforth we are to be partners, both working together?"

"I suppose so."

"Then hand over some chink, old man, for mine's all gone."

"If you want money you must obtain it," said Jonathan. "I have none."

"I don't believe that, guv'nor. However, I suppose it won't matter if there is a little difference of opinion between us. I feel sure you've got money somewhere. If I hadn't, do you think I should have been such a fool as to put you up to that nice little plan of mine? Why, you would never have thought of such a thing yourself. You think yourself clever, guv'nor, but you are not, and you know it."

"I can tell you this, once and for all," replied Jonathan—"I have no money, and if I had I should not give it to you—you have plundered me enough."

"Don't use hard words, guv'nor; you hurt my feelings—you do indeed; but bear this in mind—I can't carry on without money."

"Then get some."

"What's the good? You know, guv'nor, that I'm no hand at getting money, but I'm never at a loss to know what to do with it."

"That is nothing to do with me. In a little while I will aid you in this plan you have proposed, and what we can obtain by it we will share together."

"Now, guv'nor, don't be unreasonable. Do you mean to tell me that you have been knocking about the country all this while without laying hold of a trifle?"

"I have been unfortunate, George—most unfortunate. I had money, but lost it."

"More fool you, then! How much better it would have been if I had been with you,—then it would have been spent, and that would have been a great consolation to both of us."

"What are you going to do?" said Jonathan, abruptly. "It's growing towards morning, and I know hot search is being made after us by the police, and during daylight we must remain concealed somewhere."

"I suppose we must, but I was so carried away with joy at having met with you that I forgot all about it."

"Well, then, where shall we go?"

"Where do you propose?"

"I feel I am in want of rest. I have not known what it is to sleep in peace or comfort for a very long period. I am wearied almost to death."

"Well now, guv'nor, if you had only got a trifle of money with you it could be managed easily enough."

"How so?"

"Why, we would find out some retired public-house, and stop there all the day, and at night set forth and do anything that might be arranged between us."

"Do you know where there is any such place?" asked Jonathan.

"I don't,—I can't call to mind such a one, but if we travel on we shall doubtless find it; and I'll tell you another thing, guv'nor—you don't look flourishing; you have a decidedly suspicious look—your clothes are torn and mud-stained; you must make some changes in your apparel."

"But how can it be done?"

"Oh, we'll find the means, never fear! Can't you understand that your present appearance is suspicious to a degree, and calculated to attract the attention of all persons? You must make a change."

"I must—I will. I don't know how it is, George, but at times there comes over me a dreadful sense of weariness, weakness, and disgust of life."

"You're growing old, guv'nor—that's the reason."

"But there is one thing that will always animate me—that will always enable me to triumph over my foes—and

that is, the strong desire I feel to have revenge. I will be revenged upon them all!"

"Shall we count them over?" said George. "We may as well refresh our memories a little while we are journeying along, it will afford us considerable pleasure."

"Yes—yes."

"Who, then, do you place first on the list?"

"Edgworth Bess."

"You long to have revenge upon her?"

"I do."

"And so do I, for I hate her bitterly—hate her for her behaviour towards me."

"And then," said Wild, "the next is Blueskin. Upon him I shall wreak my deadliest vengeance. At the present I cannot think what form my revenge will take, but something will suggest itself ere long."

"Kill him—kill him!" said George. "My revenge is always satisfied with death."

"But not mine," said Wild. "I require something more than that."

"And consequently you never get it; but I shall get you out of all these foolish whims and fancies before long. Who is next?"

At this moment a sudden recollection came over Jonathan Wild. Something that he had forgotten returned to his mind with full force.

He trembled in every limb.

The perspiration started out upon his face, and his hands quivered convulsively.

"What ails you?" said Wild junior, with surprise—"what's the matter?"

"I will tell you," said Jonathan, in a hollow voice, looking around him cautiously as he spoke—"I will tell you."

"Go on, then."

"Well, George, do you believe in ghosts—spirits—apparitions?"

Wild junior laughed.

"Not likely," he said; "such things were only invented to frighten people with. I have no belief in them at all."

"But I have," said Wild—"I have!"

"Then that's another sign you're growing old and weak-headed, guv'nor."

"I have good reason for believing in them—it seems impossible now to doubt."

"Bah!—ridiculous!"

"But I tell you I have evidence that cannot be disputed—the clearest—the best evidence, for—for—"

"For what?"

"I saw an apparition to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes, to-night, just before I first encountered you. I saw it—I saw it!"

"Saw what?"

"The apparition—the very image—of one who I know full well is numbered with the dead. By this time his body must almost have turned to dust; but yet I saw him, looking just as he did in life!"

"Who—who?"

"Why did he come from the grave to visit me? Why is it that his spirit has returned to earth? Why did he confront me? It was horrible—horrible!"

"But, d—n it all," roared Wild junior, "can't you tell me who it was?"

"It was Jack Sheppard!"

"Jack who?"

"Sheppard."

"It's all d—d nonsense, guv'nor, and you must know it! Didn't you see Jack Sheppard swinging from Tyburn Tree with your own eyes?"

"I did—I did; and most surely he is dead!"

"Dead and buried too, and I will never believe that the spirits of the deceased return to earth."

"But I saw him, George—I saw him as plainly as I can see you now; ay, plainer—for then the moon was shining with great power!"

"And you were moonstruck, I suppose?"

"George, you may scoff, and jest, and disbelieve it, but I can assure you I am not more certain in my own existence at this present moment than I am that I saw the ghost or apparition of Jack Sheppard standing in the lane."

"It was some accidental likeness," said George—"that

must be it. You are weak, and in want of rest and food—your disordered imagination has construed some slight resemblance into a perfect one. Bah! I am ashamed of you."

"But, George, answer me one question—is he dead or not?"

"Why, dead, of course! I was never more certain of anything in the whole course of my life."

"And so am I quite sure he is dead, and yet I am equally sure and certain that I saw him to-night. Do you think that I could have forgotten his appearance? Do you think that my memory would fail me in any respect? No, no! I tell you I saw him plainly and distinctly, just as he looked on that day when he took his last ride from Newgate to Tyburn Tree. And what's more, George, I saw—I saw—"

"Saw what?"

"Why, a dark and livid mark around his neck—the mark that had been left by the pressure of the hangman's rope!"

CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON THINK THEY HAVE GOT INTO COMFORTABLE QUARTERS.

ALTHOUGH he showed but little symptoms of it, yet George Wild was considerably impressed, not merely by what had been told him, but by Jonathan's manner.

How to account for this appearance he could not tell.

But he still clung, or professed to cling, to his belief that his father had made a mistake.

"Do you know," asked Jonathan—"have you ever heard what such an appearance as I have described portended?"

"Oh, gammon!"

"I ask you, have you ever heard it? Have you ever been told that when an apparition like this appears to anyone, it is a token of their approaching death? Does it mean that my death is approaching? Is my race nearly run?"

"Never you mind—keep up your courage, guv'nor! Pay no attention to such tales as these—I never did, and never shall; what's the use?"

"But—but there are other things."

"What other things?"

"An old woman—a witch—has prophesied—"

George drowned his voice with a laugh.

"You are growing superstitious, guv'nor. Upon my word, I am surprised at you—quite surprised! I could never have believed it of you—it's too absurd!"

"You may affect to treat it lightly," responded Jonathan. "I try to banish it from my mind, but there are times when I cannot do so—when these thoughts will obtrude themselves."

"And I daresay they do just at the present time."

"They do—they do!"

"I am not surprised at it—I can easily account for it."

"How so?"

"By your own confession you are in want of food and sleep. Rely upon it, when these wants are supplied, you will be quite another being. Come on—let us make better speed!"

At a more rapid rate than before, they now trotted along the high-road.

Morning was slowly breaking, and the damp, chill wind that came blowing from the east certainly tended in no way to raise Jonathan's drooping spirits.

"Perhaps he will appear again—perhaps I shall once more obtain a glimpse of him—perhaps you may see him too."

"Well, guv'nor, perhaps I shall, and I sincerely hope it."

"Hope it?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Do you know what I should do?"

"No. Perhaps be paralysed by fear, as I was."

"No, guv'nor—nothing of the kind. I should fire a pistol at him, and d—d soon make out whether he was a live man or a ghost!"

"But you could not—you could not! I am sure that

you would be completely overcome when your eyes rested upon such a supernatural visitor. I was, for I sank back in a swoon, and in a swoon I remained for many hours."

"No doubt it was caused by want of food—there can be no question about that. But keep your courage up for five minutes longer, guv'nor, and then you will be all right."

Jonathan did indeed seem to be in a most despondent state of mind.

Beyond a doubt George Wild had hit upon the true solution of his bodily condition.

"Look before you," said Wild junior, "and take courage from the sight. Do you see those chimneys and that red roof yonder?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, I feel pretty certain that is an inn. When we once gain the shelter of that, all will be well."

Jonathan looked with eager eyes towards the dwelling before them.

It was at some distance off and much hidden by the trees, and it was only indistinctly visible in the dim, grey morning light.

Upon a closer approach, however, Wild junior found that he was in error.

He had made a mistake as to the character of the building.

It was not an inn, but a farm-house.

He raised himself in the stirrups, and looked all about him in the hope of discerning another habitation.

But in this he was unsuccessful.

Jonathan was deeply disappointed.

"I tell you what it is, guv'nor," said George; "we won't go travelling on any further if we can help it. Come along with me. We will ask for food and shelter at this farm-house—that is, if you have got a little money in your pocket that will enable us to pay for what we have."

"I have a little," growled Wild, "but only a little."

"But will it suffice for our purpose?"

"Yes."

"That's all right, then, guv'nor. Come along—I have no doubt we shall be able to make ourselves very comfortable in this quarter."

At a sharp trot they advanced to the gate leading to the farm-house.

Through this they passed, and soon afterwards stopped at the homestead.

Early as it was—the hour being only just about sunrise—the inhabitants were all astir.

Wild junior took the lead in all these proceedings, for he found that he was most competent to do so.

He knocked loudly at the door, and waited impatiently for a response.

A rough-looking labourer opened the door.

"Is the master in?" said George, boldly. "If he is, I want to speak to him."

The man turned round, and immediately afterwards the farmer himself appeared.

"We are travellers," said George, in a bluff, off-handed way he could assume very well when he liked—"rather poor ones, to be sure, but we are badly in need of a little food and shelter. Don't think we come to beg. We have money enough to pay you for all we have, if you will only allow us to enter. We have been looking for hours past for an inn, without being able to find one."

"No, no," said the farmer—"there are few places of accommodation in this country. I have thought more than once that I would do a little business in the public line myself. But walk in—walk in; you are quite welcome to such accommodation as we can give."

"Thanks—thanks!" said George. "And our horses?"

"Oh, they shall be attended to, never fear! Nice-looking nags they seem to be."

"Yes," said George, "but rather tired. Like us, they want rest and something to eat."

The man who had opened the door took charge of the horses and led them to the stable, while Jonathan and his son were ushered into the large kitchen of the farm-house, where a considerable number of people were assembled, sitting down to a most substantial breakfast.

The appearance of two strangers appeared to be a most unusual event, for they could scarcely continue their eating operations, they stared so at the new-comers.

A very tempting and succulent breakfast, for hungry men especially, was placed upon the table, and to it Wild and his son did ample justice.

There was plenty of good home-brewed ale to wash the viands down, and, in fact, it had been many a day since Jonathan had fared so sumptuously.

The farmer seemed inclined to treat them with a very great amount of respect, and chatted agreeably about various matters.

George Wild kept up the conversation, and he was so good an actor that he not only overcame any feeling of suspicion which the appearance of Jonathan might create, but actually succeeded in producing a favourable impression as regarded himself.

When the meal was over, the labouring men took their departure for the fields in order to commence their daily toil.

The farmer himself rose as if to accompany them, and George Wild said:

"Now, sir, if you will complete your hospitality and render us an additional service, you will allow us to lie down somewhere and go to sleep. We shall not be particular where it is, but so many hours have elapsed since we slumbered last that it will be almost impossible to resume our journey without a nap."

"Oh, I have no objection," said the farmer—"not the least in the world! Here, dame, you see to them. Show them up into one of the rooms, and let them lie there and sleep as long as they choose. Good morning to you both!" he added, as he quitted the farm-house.

The farmer's wife, little dreaming who her visitors were, and what was their disposition, led them upstairs into a clean but rudely-furnished room.

Making some apology for the pooriness of the accommodation, she closed the door and left them.

CHAPTER DCLXXV.

GEORGE WILD BUILDS SOME VERY FINE CASTLES IN THE AIR.

JONATHAN WILD and his son flung themselves upon the bed without going through the ceremony of undressing.

"Did you notice anything peculiar in the farmer's manner?" asked George Wild, abruptly.

"No, certainly not—did you?"

"Yes, I did."

"What was it?"

"Well, I can hardly tell you—something strange and unnatural in his conduct."

"I didn't observe it."

"I did. I am sure in his inmost heart he wished us far away from this spot. I could tell it by his looks."

"Then why did he not refuse us shelter?"

"Because he might fancy that doing so would provoke suspicion. Rely upon it, there's something going on that we know nothing about, so while we stay here we must keep both our eyes and our ears open."

"But does it mean danger to ourselves?"

"There now, don't frighten yourself about nothing at all—there's no occasion. What danger can come to us, I should like to know? Who could recognise us?"

"You can't tell, but I judged from your manner that you expected something of the sort."

"No, no. The farmer has got something on his mind, I am sure of it, though what it is I can't exactly make out—perhaps we shall be able to discover ere long."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Nothing at present, guv'nor. I have locked the door, so that's all right—I shall have as long a sleep as I can get."

"But had we not better watch and sleep by turns?"

"I can't see any necessity for it. Go to sleep, guv'nor, and so will I. If anything unusual takes place I shall be sure to hear it, for at all times I am a light sleeper."

With these words George turned on his side, and soon afterwards a frightful succession of snores proclaimed that he was sleeping.

Jonathan, however, could not take things quite so easy, and so he lay for a long time in a very uneasy, restless state.

But at length he too dropped off into a profound slumber.

It seemed to him that only a moment had elapsed from the time of his closing his eyes when he felt some one touch him on the shoulder.

He started up in affright.

"Hush, guv'nor—be quiet! There's something going on, and if we are careful we shall find out what it is."

"There's no danger, then?"

"Danger? What a state of dread you are always in! Of course there's no danger; if there was, do you think I should be taking things so d—d easy as I am?"

"Well, I'm glad of it. Why, it's dark!"

"Of course it is, guv'nor, and a precious good sleep you have had—very nearly twelve hours, I calculate."

Jonathan pressed his hand to his temples.

His brain was confused.

He could scarcely believe that he had slumbered for so long a period.

But upon looking out of the window he was convinced.

"Hark!" said his son—"can you hear anything?"

With a beating heart Jonathan listened.

"I can hear a sound like the murmuring of voices," he said, at length.

"Just so—that's precisely what you can hear."

"What is it about?"

"I can't make out at present. I awoke and heard it, and then I awoke you. Come gently to the window; we will open it a little way and listen."

The window was a latticed one, so that by the exercise of a very trifling amount of caution they were able to open it noiselessly.

Night had evidently set in, for there was a complete darkness all around.

Unlike the preceding one, however, there was no moon shining in the sky.

The whole of the firmament was covered up by one huge cloud.

Now that the window was open the murmuring of voices became much more distinct—indeed, the very words that were uttered were plainly audible.

Three men were standing close together just outside the farm-house.

They were in a kind of angle of the building, and had doubtless retired there in order that their consultation might be secret.

Little did they think, however, that there were listeners at one of the windows above.

"I feel uneasy," said a voice, which they recognised immediately as the farmer's—"I feel very uneasy about this matter, and wish to goodness it was safely over! While it was no more than a little smuggling I didn't care, but this is a great risk!"

"Very true," said another voice; "but, then, remember what we shall pocket by the transaction—more than we could make by a whole year's cruising, and it will be done in less than a week."

"Yes, yes, I know that," said the farmer—"that is, of course, provided that nothing wrong takes place."

"Of course," said the other man, who had not yet spoken, but whose tones seemed those of command. "I have laid all my plans very carefully, and I might say I have no doubt as to the result."

"I wish it was over," said the farmer—"I heartily wish it was over!"

"Well, now, don't show the white feather, whatever you do! It seems to me you have got the easiest part to perform, and yet you make the greatest fuss about it."

"I can't help looking at the consequences of detection," said the farmer.

"Bah! I have no patience with you! You have no heart or courage! There's only one thing that makes me feel at all insecure, and, after all, that is a trifle."

"And what may that be?"

"I wish I had two men more for my undertaking. If I had, I should feel quite confident of success."

"Have you not enough already?"

"No, I have not, or I should not have spoken. I suppose now, however, it is too late to repair the omission."

"Well, I don't know," said the farmer, brightening a little. "Two men came this morning and asked for shelter."

"Surely you did not consent to it?" was the reply, given in accents of alarm.

"Yes, I did, for I thought that would be the best way of diverting suspicion. They will be off in an hour or two, no doubt. But they were much fatigued."

"Well, what of them?"

"They looked to me," said the farmer, lowering his voice, "as though they had been knocked about by the world a good deal, and as though they would not care particularly what they did to better their condition."

"In fact, you judge them to be a couple of desperate adventurers?"

"I do."

"And you think they might be disposed to aid us in our scheme?"

"Very likely."

"But there's the risk."

"I know that," said the farmer. "Yet we might feel our way gently with them, without letting them know what our purpose really was."

"So we could."

"For instance," continued the farmer, "instead of telling them that we are going to bring Prince Charlie over to his own country again—"

"Hush—hush!" said the other, interrupting him.

"Although we are quite alone, it is dangerous to utter such words."

"Well, well—but you know what I mean. Instead of telling them that, we might say that it was a little smuggling expedition, that would considerably benefit them if they took a share in it."

"I must think about it," said the one who appeared to be in command. "I don't like to judge hastily in such an important affair. Let us go inside. You shall have my answer presently."

With these words the three conspirators—for such they were—moved slowly from the spot, and disappeared round an angle of the building.

George Wild quietly shut the window and fastened it.

Then he flapped his hands rapidly against his sides, and in a very low tone produced a tolerable imitation of the crowing of a cock.

His exultation was extreme.

He grasped Jonathan's hand and shook it violently.

"Hurrah, guv'nor!" he said. "Three times three for good luck! We're in the way now! This is what you may call good fortune indeed! I can see my way now quite clear out of all our difficulties—I can indeed!"

"How so—how so?" said Jonathan.

"Can't you comprehend, guv'nor? It struck me all at once, like a flash of lightning. But I'll tell you."

"What is it?"

"Why, in the first place, it has turned out that I was quite right about the farmer."

"So it has."

"We know now what the secret is upon his mind. He is a Jacobite, and so are those who are with him. Their intention, as avowed, is neither more nor less than to bring Charles Stuart, the Pretender, over to England. Depend upon it, they will secrete him in this farm-house. Why he is coming, of course we cannot tell; but that they mean to bring him seems quite certain. Now, guv'nor, I only hope one thing, and that is, that they will ask us to join them."

"Do you think they will do so?"

"Well, that is just the difficulty. I really hope so, because if they do I shall consent, and then, guv'nor, our fortunes will be made. You will be able to recover all your lost power. Money will pour in upon you, and, guv'nor, I shall be your partner!"

CHAPTER DCLXXVI.

JONATHAN WILD INDULGES IN THE DREAM OF RESUMING HIS FORMER GREATNESS, AND GEORGE WILD SUSTAINS HIS PART TO ADMIRATION.

"A DREAM—a dream!" said Jonathan—"that's all 'a dream—a dream in which it would be vain and foolish for me to indulge! No, no, George—those times are past and gone, and never can return!"

"I say no, guv'nor!"

"A castle in the air," continued Jonathan, "and an altogether foolish notion! No, no,—I cannot—must not buoy myself up with the hope that I may once again find myself in the possession of that power that I have lost for ever!"

"Now, guv'nor, will you listen to me?"

"Yes—go on."

"Don't speak in that desponding way, but pay attention."

"I am paying attention."

"Can't you see how it is to be done? You shake your head. Then I will tell you."

"Do so, but don't speak in quite such a loud voice."

"A good caution, guv'nor—a very good caution."

George Wild lowered his voice and said:

"Now mind this, guv'nor, if we are asked about this matter, let us swear ourselves to be true Jacobites—Jacobites to the backbone. Do you hear that?"

"Yes."

"We will fall in with all their views exactly, and lead them to suppose that our heart is in the work—as it will be—as it will be!" he added, rubbing his hands together gleefully as he spoke.

"How so?" said Jonathan.

"Why, when we get Prince Charlie on board we will never lose sight of him, and instead of his coming to this house, mind you, we will carry him off somewhere and keep him secure. In the meanwhile, we will communicate with the Government and make known our capture. You know their hatred of the Stuarts as well as I do, and you must be aware that they would jump at any opportunity of putting the Pretender out of the way. They will be induced to forgive and forget all our past offences, and, take my word for it, a full and free pardon will be made out for both!"

While Wild junior spoke, Jonathan's eyes grew brighter and brighter.

His face flushed with excitement, and his breath came short and thick.

"I do believe it, George," he gasped—"I do believe it! But the prospect is too much—too great for me to bear."

"I would bet my life upon it," said George Wild—"the only difficulty is in getting the Pretender into our possession. If we can once do that, we can dictate our own terms to the Government."

Jonathan clasped his hands over his head.

"Oh that I could stop the dreadful beating in my brain!" he said. "But this excitement is too much—too much!"

"Calm yourself, guv'nor," said his son—"calm yourself! Lie down for a short time, and then we will descend. You must be very careful in all your behaviour. I only hope the leader of the expedition will make up his mind to ask our aid."

Jonathan's excitement was too great to allow him to rest.

After a brief pause they both descended to the kitchen.

Here they found the farmer and several other men—all strangers, and certainly bearing about them the appearance of belonging more to the ocean than the land.

"We are indebted to you for your hospitality," said George, advancing towards the farmer. "Let us know how much we have to pay you. It is time for us to start again."

"And where may you be bound?" asked the farmer.

"Nowhere in particular," replied George, in his off-hand way. "We are looking out for anything that may turn up. We have had bad luck lately—very bad luck!"

There was a pause, during which the landlord glanced at one of his guests.

This George concluded to be the leader of the expedition.

There was a degree of doubt and irresolution on this man's face, as though he was undecided what course to adopt.

At length, turning round, he said:

"I suppose you are not very particular about what you do?"

"How do you mean?" said George. "We are not very particular in some things, for in such hard times as these we should find it difficult to live if we were."

"I thought so. I suppose you would think it no great sin to cheat the tax-collector?"

"No, d—n me if I should!" said George. "I consider that a virtue and a duty that ought to be practised by every man."

There was a laugh at this, and the stranger continued.

"Then I suppose you would not mind depriving the revenue officers of a trifle, eh?"

"Smuggling?"

"Yes, if you like to call it so."

"Not by any means," said George. "I have done a little in that line before now, but not much, and it is a good many years ago."

"Well," said the stranger, "I may as well out with it at once. We know of a capital run, but we can't take advantage of it, because we are short-handed. Now, if you two will make up your minds to join us, why, it will be a very nice thing indeed for you."

George turned aside and made a pretence of consulting Jonathan.

"We are quite agreeable," he replied; "in fact, to tell you a little secret, we were making our way down to the sea-coast in the hope of falling in with something of the kind."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; we have facilities for disposing of silks or brandy, or in fact, anything that crosses the water on the sly, and we thought we might be able to make some arrangements."

"I am glad we have had the good fortune to fall in with you, then," said the stranger, with a sigh of relief.

It must be borne in mind that it was never his intention to trust these two men—Wild and his son—with the important secret of their undertaking, but only to lead them to believe that it was a smuggling expedition.

But, as we are aware, the secret was already known.

"When shall you require us to start?" said George.

"We are in perfect readiness for any time you may think proper to appoint."

"At midnight," said the stranger. "All our preparations will be made by then."

"We will be ready," said George. "What's the hour now?"

"Almost eleven."

More refreshments were brought out and placed before them.

Both were in a state of the greatest possible excitement. As for Jonathan, he could scarcely contain himself.

Fortune, he firmly believed, was once more about to smile upon him, and he no longer looked upon what his son had said as a mere dream or castle in the air.

There was a kind of tangible reality about it, and a strong degree of probability.

The glass circulated freely among the men, and one of them, standing up, said:

"Here's to the health of the King!"

This was a toast they all intended to drink with the greatest enthusiasm, for while it would provoke no suspicion and seemed quite loyal, they could really drink to the health of the exiled favourite.

"Stop!" said George, suddenly. "What King do you mean?"

The others stared at him in surprise.

"I am no King worshipper," he said, "and I am not afraid to say it; but least of all I like those German paupers who have settled themselves in this country, so if you are going to drink *his* health, I say no! It's what I have never done yet, and may I be d—d if ever I do!"

George Wild spoke these words with great boldness, and apparent warmth.

The leader of the expedition looked upon him with an admiring eye.

He judged him to be reckless, daring, courageous—not caring what he said.

There was a momentary hesitation, and the men all looked at one another.

"If you are no friend to the Georges," said the leader, at length, after a long pause, "we need not fear telling you what King we are drinking to—it is to the health of Charlie over the water, and may he soon come back to his own!"

"So say I!" said George, heartily. "If we are to have a King at all, by all means let us have one from the old stock! Here's to the health of King Charles, and let us hope that it will not be very long before he really is so, not that there appears any chance of it at present, for the people of England are forgetting the Stuarts, and becoming accustomed to German rule."



[THE CONSPIRATORS DRINK THE HEALTH OF CHARLES STUART.]

CHAPTER DCLXXVII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON JOIN THE CONSPIRATORS.

An ominous silence followed these words of George Wild's.

All the men stood round, with their glasses half raised to their lips.

Then the one who appeared to be in command over the rest said:

"I don't know about that, young man—I don't know about that; indeed, it is my belief—and I have good ground for having it—that the people are growing more and more disgusted every day with the present ruler of these realms. If King Charles could only once plant his foot on English soil, he would be surrounded in a few hours by a large army; every day would add to its numbers, and, like some mighty tide, it would go rolling

on and entirely overwhelming those who are at present in power."

"Well, perhaps it may be so, or perhaps not,—d—n me if I much know or care either; but, as I said before, I have no objection to drinking the health of Charlie over the water."

"Then," said the leader, "prepare all of you to drink. Drain your glasses to the toast: Here's to the health of King Charles of England, and may the time soon come when he will be seated on the throne that rightfully belongs to him!"

The toast was drunk with enthusiasm, especially by Jonathan and his son.

But after that there was a pause, and, as it seemed, rather an awkward one.

Each man looked half suspiciously and half distrustfully into the countenance of the one standing next to him, as though he feared to find a spy or a traitor.

All were conscious that the words they had just spoken and the toast they had just drunk were rank treason, and that if a knowledge of their proceedings came to the ears of the Government it would be sufficient to consign them to the prison—perhaps to the scaffold.

The leader of the expedition appeared inclined to sound the two strangers still further as to their views.

"Should you have any objection," he said, "to place yourselves beneath the banner of our lawful King? Let us know; if so, you may find that I shall have something to say to you that will turn out greatly to your advantage."

"Not the least in the world," said George, readily. "King George is no friend of ours, and never has been, and I should rejoice to see him lying in the dust."

"Well, then, swear solemnly that you will not disclose anything I may tell you, and we will proceed further."

"We'll swear," replied George. "Propose any oath you may think proper."

The leader did so, and a terrible formula was pronounced.

Then a little book was produced, which George and Jonathan both kissed, and said:

"We swear!"

"That is enough," said the leader. "And now, when I have spoken, you can please yourselves whether you consent to join us or not—it is by no means compulsory. If you have any objection to it, say so, and you shall depart in peace—only you must forget what has taken place to-night. On the other hand—"

He paused.

"Go on," said George—"let us hear it. If it is something that will put money in our pockets, that after all will be the chief inducement, for we have been terribly pushed of late."

"It will put money in your pockets, then," replied the leader—"it will make the fortunes of both of you for the remainder of your lives. Listen! Secret arrangements have been made for a long time past for a second uprising in the favour of Charles Stuart—one that will be infinitely stronger and better conducted than the one in 1715. Our part of the duty is to cross over to Ostend in a small vessel that we have belonging to myself, and at the place I have mentioned we shall find King Charles. He will be disguised. We shall bring him on board and return with him to England. The intelligence of his landing will spread itself like lightning through the land, and in a single day he will have an army at his back. All those who take an active part in these preliminary proceedings will meet with a large reward—not merely a reward paid down to them in money, but in appointments to various offices, and large salaries that will last during the whole of their lifetime."

"It sounds well," said George—"very well, and we are with you. I will help you to the last."

"Good—then for this little voyage to Ostend and back you shall have each of you ten pounds. Here—hold out your hands and take the King's money."

Jonathan and his son stretched forth their hands eagerly.

Five guineas were counted into the palms of each.

"That is half the amount," said the leader—"the remainder you will receive when the journey is accomplished."

"And when do we start?" said George.

"To-night—I might say immediately. All is in readiness, and the sooner this part of our work is over the better. The people now are ripe for a rebellion; they will bear the German yoke no longer, and are determined to cast it off."

"Very good," said George—"I am quite willing. The sooner the better, say I."

"We will have one more toast before we separate," cried the leader. "Fill up your glasses to the brim, and we will drink—Success to our expedition!"

The men drained their glasses eagerly, and, with the exception of Wild and his son, there can be no doubt that they were all fully in earnest in what they were about, and all extremely anxious that the young Pretender should be seated on the throne.

"Now, then," cried the leader—"follow me! Horses are ready, and the distance to the sea-shore is trifling.

Come on—in a few hours more we shall have the satisfaction of kneeling before our King!"

With these words the leader left the farm-house, and was followed by the men, the farmer himself being one of them.

Horses were waiting outside, and with very little delay the whole party seated themselves in the saddles.

The word "Forward!" was then given, and off they went at a rapid trot.

No particular order of march was observed.

They rode in a straggling throng.

Jonathan and his son kept side by side.

By slow degrees they dropped further and further back into the rear, so that they should be able to exchange a few words with each other without being overheard.

Jonathan himself was exceedingly anxious to speak.

Since he had heard the conspiracy, he had been plunged in deep thought, and had indulged in a thousand strange meditations.

"George," he said, in tones just loud enough to reach the ears of his son.

"What now, guv'nor?"

"Don't speak so loud, but just attend to what I say."

"All right—go on!"

"Candidly and truly, what do you think of this conspiracy?"

"Why, that in the end it will turn out a d—d good thing for us!"

"No, no—that is not what I mean. What is your opinion as to the success that it will meet with?"

"I don't know, guv'nor, how it might be if we hadn't joined them; but I shall take care that the affair is nipped in the bud, because I intend taking the young Pretender prisoner before King George my very own self."

"Hush—hush! The wind is blowing, and some of the words you are saying may reach the ears of those men; if so, our death would be certain!"

"We had better say no more about it," returned George.

"It appears to me that our minds are made up as to the manner in which we should proceed, and therefore there is no necessity for conversation."

"But I wish to say a word or two, George."

"Say on, then; but be careful in your speech."

"I will. You remember what you were saying to me with regard to the position I had lost, and the probability there was that I should regain it?"

"Yes, yes! And are we not in a fair way for it—eh, guv'nor? This will be the best thing in the world for us!"

"Yes, no doubt; but suppose for a moment that this enterprise should succeed—how then?"

"It is impossible that it should. We don't intend to let them."

"But if otherwise? There seems a reasonable prospect. Is it not worth while for us to consider whether we shall really espouse their cause and not pretend to do so? Recollect what the leader of the expedition said. He told us that not only should we receive a great reward, but we should also be appointed to different offices. Now, if all goes well, I can see clearly enough how I may regain my former power, and how I shall be able to wreak my utmost vengeance upon those I hate! What do you think of it, George?—tell me that!"

CHAPTER CCLXXVIII.

JONATHAN AND THE CONSPIRATORS REACH OSTEND IN SAFETY.

"WHY, I think while you are growing older you are turning into a d—d fool!"

"But you have not considered my question."

"Yes, I have. Don't get your head full of those foolish notions, guv'nor, because if you do we shall be done for at once; besides, I don't intend to allow it."

"Allow?"

"Yes, I am determined to take the lead in this affair from beginning to end. I will not suffer any interference on your part. It is a most excellent thing, and will turn out greatly to our advantage if we manage matters rightly. But don't you think for one moment that the Stuarts will ever return to take their place on the throne,

because I am quite sure they will not. Now, then, let that end the matter once and for all!"

After these words, Jonathan rode on for a long time in gloomy silence.

He was pondering in his mind upon all that he had heard, and, strangely enough, he felt more inclined to take part with the conspirators than to betray them.

He felt sure that, could their end be achieved, he should obtain such power and position as he had never before dreamt of.

But what was sweeter than all, every one of those persons who had had any share in his capture, imprisonment, or pursuit would be entirely in his power.

The Secretary of State, too, who had been such a bitter foe to him, would be a proscribed exile.

It was a delightful thing for Jonathan to dream upon.

It was glorious even in fancy to endeavour to decide what would be the ultimate fate of those he hated.

His speculations and reflections were broken in upon by his son.

"Now, guv'nor," he said, "I can tell just as well as if you were speaking that you are still thinking about the benefit you would derive if the conspirators succeeded in their designs. I am right, am I not?"

"Yes, I was thinking of it. The more I turn the matter over in my mind, the more convinced do I feel that they will succeed."

"And the more I consider about it," said George, "the more certain do I feel that they will as signally fail. As yet the enterprise may be said to be entirely in the bud. So much depends upon circumstances, and, as regards all the parties concerned, the result will either be a success or utter ruin. And now just think. It seems to me without any reasonable grounds they count upon gaining a large number of people to their side. This I firmly believe will turn out to be a mistake."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do, guv'nor; and bear in mind the proverb which says, 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' You know well enough what an intense hatred and fear the King has of all Jacobite plots, and when we succeed in destroying this conspiracy, and in dragging the object of it before him a prisoner, will he not be so overcome with joy as to be ready to grant any request that may be made to him?"

"Yes, George; I am obliged to admit that is very reasonable indeed. I have played upon the King—the Government—pretty well with Jacobite plots at one time or other, and I know just what effect they have upon his mind. I know, too, that he would give almost anything for a pretext to put an end to the life of Charles Stuart."

"Then, after that knowledge," said George, "how can you hesitate about the course we must pursue? Our path is as clear as noonday. Don't trouble your head one bit more about it, but leave the whole to me. Do just as I tell you—obey my directions, if needs be, without asking a question, and if you do so, rely upon it the result will be a free pardon for both of us, and a reinstatement in your old position."

Again Jonathan was silent, and George appeared to consider that the reason was because he had been satisfied with the arguments given.

Jonathan, however, was in a very great state of indecision upon the subject, and indeed there is no question that but for the company of his son he would certainly have joined the conspirators in earnest.

At length the sea-coast was reached.

The horses were left in charge of a man who appeared to be there waiting them, and to him the leader of the enterprise addressed a few words.

What they were Wild junior could not hear, but they appeared to be satisfactory.

"Stand close together beneath this rock," said the chief, "and then I will signal the boat."

He was obeyed.

From his pocket he rapidly took a small object which proved to be a rocket.

It was ignited, and up into the air it soared to an immense height, and was carried far over to seaward by the wind, and then it burst, and a shower of glittering fragments descended.

Several anxious moments passed, and then the chief uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

Wild and his son looked across the sea, and then in the distance they saw a bright red light.

It seemed a long way off, and no doubt it was secured in some way to the rigging of the vessel.

Then the chief produced another packet which he placed upon the ground.

Its shape was conical.

This also was lighted, and a beautiful red flame immediately arose.

It burned with great steadiness and brightness, despite the wind that was blowing.

It was easy to conjecture that this light was shown in order that the rowers of the boat should know to what point to steer.

Presently the silence of the night was broken in upon by that peculiar rattling sound which is produced by the motion of oars in the rowlocks.

Then a small boat appeared in sight, in which two men were seated.

By the time it touched the beach the red light had died out.

It had just burned long enough to answer the purpose for which it was designed.

"In there, and take your seats quietly!" said the leader.

It was rather a heavy load for the boat to take at once, but the sea was calm, so they did not fear, to crowd into it.

It was hard work to row, and the boat moved sluggishly across the surface of the water.

Wild and his son exchanged no further conversation, because it would have been impossible to speak without being overheard.

But they strained their eyes endeavouring to pierce the darkness, for they were anxious to make out the size and nature of the vessel that was to carry them to Ostend.

Upon coming alongside they saw it was a lumbering, clumsy-looking craft, more resembling a large fishing-boat than anything else.

With little difficulty all got on board, and then the signal to weigh the anchor was given.

Then ensued the greatest confusion.

But in a short time the sails were spread in the requisite direction to catch the wind, and with a rolling, heavy movement the vessel plunged on her way.

Wild and his son made a computation of the number of people on board the boat, and, including themselves, they discovered the number to be about twenty.

The sea was calm and the wind favourable.

The leader of the expedition was also captain of the vessel, and he looked up at the sky and nodded his head with satisfaction.

He descended to the cabin, and was there occupied for a considerable time in writing.

George Wild was anxious to learn all, and peeped through the skylight and saw him thus engaged.

All the crew were very sanguine as to the result.

A double allowance of grog was served out, and they drank to the health of King Charles with great enthusiasm.

Wild junior was in high spirits.

He considered that he had been favoured by Fortune to an uncommon extent.

Nothing could be better or more agreeable to him, and, looking into the future, he felt confident that everything would turn out well.

His only uneasiness was caused by Jonathan.

That he was still indulging in speculations of what would be the result to himself if the conspiracy turned out successful he was quite sure, and he regretted it, for the credit must be given to George Wild of being able to weigh the probabilities of the occurrence of any future event pretty accurately.

In his nature, he was to the full as unscrupulous as his rascally parent; and, as we know, it was not from any devotion to the crown or any loyal feeling that he determined to unmask the conspiracy, but only because he believed his personal gain by doing so would be considerable.

His only course was to keep a sharp look-out upon Jonathan, and prevent him from taking any other course than that which had been agreed upon.

Without the occurrence of an accident, or any incident of importance, the voyage was performed.

When the land was visible, all the men displayed great joy and satisfaction; and as they knew there was nothing to fear from a disclosure of their sentiments, they spoke freely concerning King Charles.

Although the conspiracy seemed to be so badly planned, yet they were all most sanguine as to its results.

The idea that they should fail, and that the end of all would be an ignominious death upon the scaffold, never once entered their minds, or, if it did, they banished the thought as being not worthy to be dwelt upon.

CHAPTER DCLXXIX.

WILD JUNIOR AND JONATHAN COMMENCE THEIR VOYAGE HOMEWARD.

It was quite dark when the lumbering vessel cast anchor just off the shore.

The captain was in a state of great excitement, and no sooner had he seen that all was right than he ordered the small boat to be lowered.

Into this he leaped, having two of the crew with him to row him to the shore.

Jonathan and his son, leaning over the edge of the vessel, watched the boat depart and disappear in the darkness.

They would have been very glad to have taken part in that portion of the enterprise, but they were not permitted to do so.

They would have to wait in suspense until the captain came on board again.

Wild junior glanced keenly around him, and finding that there was no one within earshot, said:

"Now, guv'nor, above all things take care what you do, or this elaborate scheme of ours will be entirely spoiled."

"I will be careful. Don't show any further anxiety on my account—it is unnecessary."

"I don't think so, guv'nor. I know just what you are. But when this Charles Stuart comes on board, be sure you do everything you can to display your devotion to his cause. You may depend I shall be profuse in my professions, and if you do the like, why, then, all suspicion will be turned away from us."

"I will do it," said Jonathan. "I will do it; but enough has been said upon the subject."

"Very good. It's a dangerous matter to converse about, and yet, guv'nor, I can't help looking into the future, and picturing to myself how things are likely to turn out."

"I do the same."

"I know you do; but I am afraid you are misled by a false notion. I am quite certain, however, that if we can only succeed in making the Pretender prisoner, King George would be ready to accede to any demands we might think proper to make."

"Yes—I should not wonder," said Wild; "but yet, if by any means this rebellion could be carried on successfully—"

"Bah!—rubbish!"

"I say if it could, then what a complete satisfaction it would be to us! All the past could be forgotten, and we should be able to trample our powerful enemies beneath our feet!"

"But you need not speculate on that, guv'nor, as I told you before, because it is quite impossible. Always stick to the strongest side, and you may depend that in this case the strongest is King George. He is too firmly planted upon the throne ever to be hurled from it. I am quite sure this is the case."

"Well, well—I must give you credit for having sound common sense on your side, George. There is nothing like keeping on the strongest side, and therefore I am agreeable that our original scheme should be carried out."

"I wish I could keep you in that mind, guv'nor. I believe you see the reasonableness of it now, but in a little while you will begin to think again, and your mind will change."

"I think not, George—I think not."

"Well, hush—don't say another word just at present! There's one of those fellows coming skulking along towards us. Take no notice of him."

The approach of one of the crew put an end to this conversation between Wild junior and Jonathan, so they leaned over the side of the vessel in silence, watching for the return of the captain.

George Wild was more anxious to catch sight of the Pretender than perhaps he would have admitted even to himself.

He desired to see the man, so that he might judge of what chance he would stand in an encounter with him, for his plan was to secure him as a prisoner, and carry him to London in triumph.

How this was to be achieved while the prince kept any sort of body guard about his person, not even Wild junior could tell.

But he trusted entirely to events.

Some accidental circumstance might occur of which he would be able to take every advantage.

Nearly the whole night elapsed without anything being seen of the captain.

At last, towards daybreak, there came the sound of oars upon the silent water, and soon afterwards the boat appeared in sight.

It was rather heavily laden with individuals of rather a motley appearance.

Jonathan and his son took up such positions that they were able to give a scrutinising glance to everyone who stepped on board.

Lanterns were fixed to various parts of the vessel's rigging, and by the dim, uncertain light that this afforded, they perceived the captain ascend the vessel's side.

Then followed some rather unprepossessing individuals—people having the appearance of depending entirely upon their wits for a subsistence, and by the manner in which they glanced about them it would seem as though they were ever in dread that some bailiff might step forward and touch them upon the shoulder.

As these new-comers reached the vessel, they stood round so as to be in readiness to welcome the Pretender in somewhat of a royal fashion.

They took off their hats and bent their knees, all on board following their example.

Then there appeared upon deck a tall, pale man, very thin, and with an anxious, careworn countenance.

This was Charles Stuart, the Pretender.

Loud cries now rent the air, every man trying to outvie his neighbour in exclaiming:

"Long life to King Charles of England!"

A flush of colour suffused the usually pale features of the Pretender, and he took off his hat and bowed deeply, muttering some words of acknowledgment.

Perhaps at that moment he felt almost like a king.

Certainly it recalled with painful distinctness past events that he would gladly enough have forgotten.

"Welcome, your Majesty!" said the captain, advancing—"welcome to this vessel! Upon its deck only your true supporters stand—men who are anxious you should obtain that which is rightfully your own—men who are willing to strain every nerve and to pour out their life's blood in the accomplishment of that purpose."

Then, one by one, those who were on board walked past the prince and saluted him.

This ceremony over, they returned to their ordinary duties.

The anchor was weighed, and after some short delay the vessel commenced her voyage homeward.

In spite of the many vices, follies, and faults of which the Stuarts were guilty, and which produced the decapitation of one and the dethronement of another, it is impossible not to feel a strong degree of interest in the descendants of this unfortunate race.

Nor can we wonder that all those descendants should continually keep their attention fixed upon the prize they had lost; and although year by year their hopes of regaining it grew less and less, yet it was long before they ceased altogether their endeavours to seat themselves upon the English throne.

The misdoings and foolish actions of a father had brought upon them this eternal exile—doings over which it was impossible they could exercise any control.

Another reason why a great degree of compassion must

be felt for the descendants of the Stuarts is, because they were so unfortunate in the choice of their friends and defenders.

In fact, they inherited from their parent that weakness and feebleness of disposition which had always characterised the Stuarts, and thus it was that they became the dupes and prey of a horde of designing scoundrels, who, in some mysterious way, seemed to live upon the spoil, and to bring those that they supported into disrepute.

It was a harassing, sad existence that they all led, and even now at the present day it may be that some of their direct or remote descendants may look with longing eyes towards England, and reflect that but for the follies of one they would be, if not actually in possession of the throne, at least holding high rank in the land.

The prince and his friends descended to the cabin in company with the captain.

Wild and his son had again an opportunity for a few moments' conversation.

"Well, gov'nor," said George, "what do you think of the would-be King now?"

Jonathan shook his head.

"Depend upon it," said his son, "there is not in him the stuff that kings are made of! He will never be a ruler—he could be nothing more than the weak instrument of others! I might have felt some little compunction in betraying him had he been other than he is; but now—"

"Well?"

"Why, now I feel that I shall be doing myself a service, you a service, him a service, and a service to the whole nation at large."

"How so? I can understand your words so far as they apply to ourselves, but what's the nature of the service you would render him?"

George gave a peculiar smile.

"Why, his life must be a most unfortunate possession for him—he can never know happiness, and therefore it would only be an act of mercy to put him out of his misery."

CHAPTER DCLXXX.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON ONCE MORE COME IN SIGHT OF ENGLAND.

WILD junior laughed discordantly at what he was pleased to consider his own wit.

"Bear in mind also," he continued, "how great a satisfaction it would be to the King and all the people at large if they knew that these Stuarts were carefully put out of the way of doing any further mischief to anybody."

"Well, George, I will tell you one thing."

"What's that?"

"I am quite sure you are quite right, and that the course you have adopted is the best for us to pursue. I can tell that the prospects are very slight indeed of such a one as he is succeeding to the English throne. The fate of this insurrection must be a thousand times more disastrous than any yet."

"Yes, you may rely upon that, but I question whether it will come so far as an open rebellion. Consider in your mind what will be the best plan for us to adopt, and how you think we shall be able to succeed in making the Pretender prisoner and carrying him to London."

"He does not look very strong."

"No; on the contrary, he is weak, and if he was taken by surprise he would be so overcome that he would be as helpless as a child. From him we have nothing to dread; but bear in mind that we are only two in number, and that he is surrounded by a large troop of friends, and numbers in such a case as this makes all the difference."

"I know all that. It must be a stratagem—some deeply-laid and cunningly worked-out scheme."

"That's it, gov'nor, and I fancy that between us we shall be able to hit upon something. At any rate, there will be plenty of time before we get to England. Was there ever such a slow-moving craft as this?"

"Never; I should think she seems scarcely seaworthy. I suppose the reason why she was chosen is because suspicion would not be likely to be directed to it."

"That's it, you may depend; but look at those clouds yonder—how threatening they look! I fancy, although I know little of the sea, that we shall have a storm."

Scarcely had Wild spoken than the captain, who had come on deck, roared out some orders to his men.

Instantly all was the greatest bustle and confusion—everyone was making as much speed as possible, for the danger that threatened them was imminent.

Scarcely had the last order been obeyed than there came a tremendous gust of wind, which almost buried the lumbering vessel beneath the waves.

Then a calm succeeded, and the vessel managed to right itself.

It was a calm of brief duration, however, and it was succeeded by a squall of wind infinitely more violent than the first.

Then the storm broke forth with great fury.

"It is a case with us," said Wild—"we are done for at last! This vessel can never outride a gale like this—we shall all go to the bottom, as sure as fate!"

Jonathan was greatly alarmed, but he had already had some severe experience in nautical matters, and was, therefore, scarcely so downhearted as his son.

Some alarm was, however, evidently felt by the Pretender and his adherents, for they all quitted the cabin and came on deck, looking about them anxiously.

In vain the captain implored them to go below.

"There is no danger," he cried—"at least, no particular danger. You may not think well of this old craft, but I can tell you she has weathered many a gale when better ships—to all appearance—have foundered. She is light like a cork—we carry no heavy load—her timbers are every one sound, and unless some accident should happen we shall be all right."

Although the captain spoke in this tone of confidence, his words did not tend to reassure them very greatly.

The waves became more and more turbulent, and the clumsy bark seemed every now and then as though it would plunge headforemost to the bottom.

Then it would roll fearfully to one side, to the great terror of them all.

But with an awkward motion she would right herself.

The huge billows that came rolling on like mountains broke over her, pouring tons and tons of water on her deck, but it ran off quickly, and she floated as freely as ever upon the surface.

For hours and hours the storm continued to rage with unabated violence.

All the sails had been taken in, and they were scudding under bare poles.

Yet such was the violence of the wind that the masts bent over like reeds, and threatened every moment to give way.

Suddenly, with a terrific crash that sounded high above all other sounds, the mainmast toppled over the side, and then it did indeed seem as though the vessel would be dragged beneath the waves.

But the captain did not lose his presence of mind.

He shouted out his orders to his men with calmness and precision, and, seizing an axe himself, he rushed forward, and set them the example of cutting the vessel clear of the ropes and tackle that were dragging her down so fearfully on one side.

This, however, owing to the manner in which the waves continued to break over them, was a most difficult task.

But the men, encouraged by the example of their leader, stuck to their work bravely, and at last, with a rush, the mass of hamper slipped into the sea, and the vessel, suddenly released of the strain, rolled over to the other side.

That danger was past.

There was only one more mast, and that was so small, and bent so freely before the gale, that they had little fears concerning it.

Still the bravest of them could not help giving evidence of their emotion.

They were, indeed, strongly moved by finding themselves so close in the presence of death.

Whether they had been carried by the fury of the wind and waves they scarcely knew.

All their attention was directed to keeping the bark above water.

When the captain said that all the timbers were sound, he must have spoken truly, for, notwithstanding the violence of the weather, she had not up to this moment sprung a leak of any particular importance.

Some of the men were kept at the pumps, but this was only an occasional and not an unremitting labour.

The day had almost gone before the tempest showed any signs of abatement.

By slow degrees, however, the storm subsided without having inflicted any further damage than snapping the mainmast.

Slowly the wind subsided and the waves became less angry.

But if the bark had been an indifferent sailer when furnished with a mainmast, what was she now when deprived of it?

Her motion through the water could scarcely be perceived, it was so intensely, wearily slow.

Yet all were thankful for the narrow escape from the great danger that they had had, and they were inclined to put up with this inconvenience, quite thankfully and willingly.

Just before sunset the captain succeeded in taking an observation, and then, by his calculations, he made out that they had been driven many miles out of their course, and that a considerable time would elapse before they reached the place which had been appointed for landing.

There was no help for this. They had to put up with it as best they could.

Two days and nights passed away before they saw anything of the land.

It was early in the morning when the shores of England became visible in the distance.

The captain, after a few anxious words of consultation with the Pretender, stood off to sea again.

To attempt to land during daylight would have been hazardous in the extreme, and so they were compelled to beat about during the whole of the day, keeping out of sight of land.

As soon as darkness descended, however, they made the best speed they could to the coast.

A rocket was sent up from the deck of the vessel, and all eyes were anxiously turned to the land for the response to the signal.

It came in the shape of the same crimson light that we have previously described.

"All's well," said the captain—"there is no danger, and no people lurking about, or that light would not be exhibited. Courage—courage! We have had much danger up to the present, but there is nothing but security before us. In an hour from now at the most we shall be on shore, and in a few days after that I trust we shall all have the satisfaction of seeing the throne of England occupied by its rightful heir."

A loud cheer was given by all the men at the conclusion of this speech.

The sound rang out clearly and distinctly over the waves, and the captain, raising his hand, cautioned them to be silent.

CHAPTER DCLXXXI.

WILD JUNIOR DEVISES AND PUTS INTO EXECUTION A VERY CUNNING TRICK.

"HUSH—hush!" he said—"make no more noise than you are absolutely obliged! We want no attention called to our proceedings. Now, the more secret we are the better. Defer your cheers until the proper time, and then you may shout aloud to your hearts' content."

Abashed, the men shrunk back, and soon afterwards they were employed in casting anchor.

"Now," whispered George, to Jonathan, "if they will only send us with the Pretender in the first boat, and leave us on shore with him while they return to fetch the rest, why, all will be well. We shall have great odds to contend against, but, then, I don't despair of success."

"It is too desperate, George—too desperate!" replied Jonathan, shaking his head.

"Well, we shall see; if I perceive the chance and commence the attack, you must second me as well as you are able—that will be our only chance."

"I will; but don't lose all through a little rashness. Be patient and abide your time,—the opportunity will come, you may rest assured of that."

To George's extreme disappointment, he was sent with some more of the men in the first boat.

All the way he continued to mutter curses under his breath.

Upon reaching the shore, he found that many other persons had assembled—a much greater throng than he had expected.

They were persons of considerable influence, who had been told that the Pretender would arrive, and who had repaired to the shore in order to welcome him as soon as he landed.

Several journeys had to be made before they all stood up in the beach.

The form of greeting the Pretender was again gone through, and this time with much more ceremony than on the previous occasion.

Horses had been provided in readiness for all, and after a little delay they mounted and set themselves in motion.

They were truly a most formidable troop, and George Wild saw his chances of being able to make the Pretender his prisoner grow less and less; in fact, it seemed totally impossible while he continued surrounded by his adherents as he was then.

Nor was it possible that the expedition could be long kept secret.

The appearance of such a troop passing through the country would attract not only attention but suspicion.

Wild junior was exceedingly curious to know what would be the nature of their movements.

All their future proceedings, however, were kept a profound secret; not a word was uttered respecting them.

Therefore Wild and his son were obliged to draw their conclusions from what they saw.

"I have it, guv'nor," cried George at length, in a low voice. "I know what's their first move. I recognise the road now well enough. They are going to the farm-house."

"Do you think they will stay there?"

"Well, that is more than I can tell."

"I should think not, for the place appeared to me to be small, and quite incompetent to lodge so many men."

"I don't know. It is in a very out-of-the-way place, and you cannot tell what they may have agreed to do, nor what accommodation they have provided."

"No, we cannot tell that," returned Jonathan, "and men are easily lodged anywhere."

"True, and now it seems to me we must deliberate a little."

"Upon what?"

"I am undecided whether it will be better for us to proceed to the farm-house or not."

"But how can you help doing so? How can you leave this tarrog?"

"Oh, I will find a means of doing that! But just consider this point: These men are in strong numbers, and it seems to me that it is utterly impracticable to carry out our first plan."

"You mean, to seize the Pretender?"

"Yes. You may depend he will never be left alone for a single moment, and for two men to attempt to bear him off in face of so many is too absurd to be thought of."

"But what else can we do?"

"I have just been thinking. Beyond all reasonable doubt, they are going to the farm-house, and probably will stay there for some hours, in order to rest themselves after their long journey."

"Well?"

"We, I think, had better adopt some stratagem to leave them, but, mind you, without creating any suspicion in their breasts."

"But that is impossible."

"Well, we shall see. Where there's a will, guv'nor, there's a way."

"But I can't see how there is in this case."

"Wait a little while, I say. We must do this, and afterwards we will gallop on to London and make the King acquainted with the particulars of this conspiracy—let them capture the Pretender themselves. But I admit that it is not so good as carrying him before them a prisoner ourselves, but that thought I am convinced must be abandoned."

"But now, what about this plan for quitting them without causing suspicion?"

"I must put it into execution at once," returned George, "or we shall be too near to the farm-house—just listen."

George bent sideways in the saddle and murmured a few words close to Jonathan's ear.

He comprehended their purport, and nodded his head with satisfaction.

Suddenly Wild junior's horse reared up and became, or, rather, appeared to become, quite unmanageable.

The whole troop was thrown into confusion by the restiveness of this one horse.

George appeared to be making every effort to calm it, but to all appearance without any success, for the horse, rearing up suddenly on its hind legs, flung Wild junior to the earth, where he lay as if stunned.

The whole thing, as the reader of course comprehends, was a mere trick.

He had taken care to slip off the horse in such a manner as to hurt himself very little, if at all, and yet he lay in the road like one half dead.

This accident caused a complete stoppage.

Jonathan descended from his steed.

"My poor son!" he exclaimed, "he is killed—he is dead!"

"No he is not," said one of the men, "he is breathing."

At this moment Wild junior uttered a low groan.

With well-meant intentions several dismounted, and, going to him, attempted to raise him to his feet.

"He will be all right," they said to Jonathan, "as soon as he gets on his legs again."

But as soon as they were about to touch him, Wild junior screamed out as if in great agony.

"Don't touch me!" he cried—"don't touch me; let me lie just where I am for awhile—don't touch me!"

They shrank back.

The leader of the expedition now made his appearance in order to ascertain the meaning of the stoppage.

"An accident?" he said.

"Yes," replied Jonathan, with well-acted concern, "it is my son; his horse suddenly shied at something and threw him. I fear he is very badly hurt."

"What is to be done?" said the leader. "There are no habitations anywhere about this region, and no opportunity of getting assistance."

"I don't know what can be done, sir!" replied Jonathan, humbly. "I am willing to leave it all in your hands."

"Well, we cannot all stop here with the Prince as well, that's quite certain, and, moreover, we could render him no service if we did."

"Then, if you are willing," said Jonathan, "I will stay with him. Perhaps after a short time he may so far recover as to be able to resume his seat in the saddle."

"I think it very likely he is bruised and stunned, but I hope not seriously hurt. You shall remain with him, and we will push on. Our destination is the farm-house—you know it?"

"I do."

"We shall stay there twenty-four or thirty-six hours, perhaps longer. If in the meanwhile you can get your son along slowly, we will take care that he has every attention as soon as he arrives."

"A thousand thanks, sir!" said Jonathan, earnestly—"a thousand thanks! My poor son! I am afraid he is more hurt than you imagine!"

"I hope not; but, however, you must do your best to recover him and get him to the farm-house. Now, then," he added, turning to his men, "quick march!"

The whole troop now set itself in motion.

Jonathan, kneeling down by the side of his son, watched it as far as he could.

While one man was in sight he did not alter his attitude in the least, nor did George Wild venture to move.

As for the leader of the expedition, he rather regretted the accident that had occurred, yet did not think much about it—his head was too full of the more important objects of the enterprise to dwell much upon a trifle like that.

CHAPTER DCLXXXII.

GEORGE WILD DICTATES A LETTER TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

"GONE!" cried Jonathan, in an exulting voice—"gone—they're all gone! The last one is out of sight!"

"Capital—capital!" cried Wild junior, as, uttering a

loud laugh, he sprang to his feet. "D—n me, guv'nor, if I didn't manage that well!"

"You did indeed!"

George shook the dust from his apparel.

"Are you hurt, George?"

"No, not in the least. I have bruised myself slightly, but nothing worth speaking of."

"Well, then, let us mount, and make all speed to London."

"Yes, to London, guv'nor—that's our destination, and we have got some important information to carry with us."

"We have. You were right as to the place they were making for. They'll stay at the farm-house perhaps for a couple of days."

"That will give us time," said George, "but none to spare. We must make our horses do the work, guv'nor. We have a long, hard ride before us, but it must be performed."

Wild and his son mounted their steeds, and after a brief deliberation struck off across the fields in the direction of the metropolis.

The course they took would, they knew, carry them far away from the farm-house.

The horses upon which they rode were those that they had left on the beach when they went on board the vessel.

During their absence the animals had been well and carefully attended to, and were full of spirit.

They would doubtless gallop far without resting, and Jonathan calculated that by good fortune they would be able to reach London in twenty-four hours.

It was strange to see how intently they fixed their minds upon this one object.

At any other time they would have been careful to look around them in search of their foes, and have shrunk back from the idea of galloping along the high-road to the metropolis.

Yet they did this on the present occasion almost without a thought.

In the very boldness of this course there must have laid some safety, for they were not molested or interfered with by anyone.

When half their journey was performed they stopped to rest.

By giving the landlord of the inn where they halted a sum of money—in fact, very nearly all they possessed—they induced him to exchange their tired, worn-out horses for two more of good quality that were in his stable.

The possession of these animals made a wonderful difference to them, and their prospect of reaching London by the time specified was very good.

As for Jonathan and his son, they seemed insensible to all fatigue, for they resumed their journey without resting for more than an hour.

While flying along at this tremendous pace, it was not possible to exchange much conversation.

But all the while Wild junior's brain was busily at work.

He was endeavouring to decide upon the safest course they could adopt upon reaching London.

This baffled him for a long time, and more than once he seemed inclined to give up thinking in despair.

It was not until the last moment that the right idea flashed into his mind.

"Hurrah, guv'nor!" he cried—"I have it! I know what we shall do now. I can't tell it you at present, but as soon as we arrive I will do so."

Jonathan gave a sigh of relief.

He had been taxing his brains to no purpose in endeavouring to decide how to make his communication known in the proper quarter.

Now that his son George had thought of the means, there was no need for him to perplex his brain any longer.

Wild junior paused at a small clothier's shop in the outskirts of London, and here he purchased two long riding cloaks such as were then generally in fashion, when people were more exposed to the vicissitudes of the weather than they are now.

They were of the most ample dimensions, coming right down to the heels, and enveloping the body entirely.

They were furnished also with large fur-lined collars.



[JONATHAN WILD WRITES A LETTER TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.]

to grant us the pardons on the conditions we ask for them."

"And you think he will put a notice to that effect in the newspapers?"

"I do."

"I am inclined to be doubtful," said Jonathan—"very doubtful! Ten to one if he gives the subject a moment's thought."

"You are unreasonably despondent, guv'nor! Cheer up! It's always darkest just before the dawn, you know!"

"It may seem strange to you, George, but now that I have written the letter I don't feel half so certain about the results as I did before."

"But I do, guv'nor, and let that be sufficient. But can you propose anything better? If you can, by all means let me hear it."

"No, I can't—that's the worst of it."

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"Then be content to let events take their course."

"I suppose I must do so."

"You must. Come, guv'nor, just rouse up a little. My confidence in the success of our scheme is undiminished. Fold up the letter and address it, and I will carry it to the post-office."

Jonathan complied with this instruction, but it was easy to see that he had quite ceased to feel any interest in what he was about.

"Be careful," he said, as he handed the letter to his son. "Take care how you leave this house—mind you are not followed."

"All right, guv'nor! Don't you trouble your head about me. Leave me to take care of myself—I am quite competent to do so. I shall be back in a few minutes."

George Wild wrapped his cloak closely around him and put on his hat.

He descended the stairs quietly.

At the bottom, on his right hand, was the bar window, and through this he gave a hasty glance.

The landlord must have heard him descend, for he turned round quickly, and seemed rather confused in his manner.

Why or wherefore it was impossible to tell, and anyone less keen-sighted than George Wild would not have noticed it.

"Going out, sir?" said the landlord, interrogatively, coming close up to the counter.

"Yes—I shall be back in a few minutes."

George stalked down the passage and out of the door into the street.

He had some distance to go before he could find a post-office, for in those days very few letters were transmitted.

At length he deposited the precious epistle, and then turned his steps towards the inn again.

Before ascending the stairs, he gave one more glance into the bar.

But this time he perceived it was vacant.

"Guv'nor," he said abruptly, as he re-entered the room, "have you heard or seen anything while I have been away?"

"No,—why do you ask?"

"Don't be so alarmed, only I fancied the landlord's behaviour was rather suspicious. Perhaps, after all, it was no more than my fancy."

"But we ought to be careful, George," said Jonathan, somewhat nervously, "for they are making close search after us—very close indeed, and to be captured now would be bitter in the extreme."

"Don't think about it, guv'nor. I don't intend to give up just at present. While we are here we will sleep with one eye open, and be ready to clear out at a moment's notice if necessary."

The remainder of the night passed by quietly enough.

Wild and his son were shown into a bed-chamber, and here they passed the night, one watching while the other slept.

In the morning, finding they had met with no interruption, they felt more at ease.

Their spirits rose as well, for once more they thought well of their scheme—perhaps better than they had yet done.

They made a hearty breakfast.

"Guv'nor," said George, addressing Jonathan, "have you made up your mind what to do while we are waiting for a reply to our letter?"

"No, I have not."

"Well, I think we are tolerably safe here, and such being the case, in my opinion we cannot do better than remain quietly where we are, and wait for the reply."

"How soon can you expect one?"

"Not before the morning, guv'nor—certainly not before then."

"I am afraid, after all, that that will be too late."

"Too late?"

"Yes. By the time we can get to the farm-house, the Pretender will have left it, and will be well defended by a large army."

"Well, guv'nor, we have no resource but to wait."

"And supposing no answer does come, how then?"

"I would rather leave the discussion of that until the time arrives. It's no good meeting trouble halfway, guv'nor—I never did it yet."

In this unsatisfactory manner the day gradually wore away.

Every now and then the villains would be startled by some simple sound or occurrence, for to them everything was alarming, being well aware of the dangerous position in which they stood.

Towards nightfall, Jonathan's impatience grew so great that it could not be restrained.

"It's no good, George," he said—"no good at all! I can't stop here, and that's a fact!"

"Where would you go, then, guv'nor?"

"Anywhere—anywhere—I don't care where!"

"Have you forgotten that there may be just a little danger in taking an evening stroll?"

"No—no. But, George, I'll tell you what I have thought."

"What—what?"

"That our communication may have been deemed of

considerable importance—of too much importance to be delayed; and if so, I think it more than likely that a handbill would be issued and posted up, offering the pardon we are asking for."

"That is very likely, guv'nor—quite likely; and the thought never occurred to me."

"Is it not worth while to ascertain?"

"I think so."

"Then let us wrap ourselves up closely in our cloaks, and look around us. If we don't find the handbill, we shall be in no extreme danger; and if we do, our danger will be over—we shall be able to walk in the streets securely."

"What a glorious thing that would be!"

"It would. But come—if we are going, let us go at once."

Wild and his son enveloped themselves in their cloaks, and concealed their countenances as much as they could.

As they descended the stairs they again saw the landlord, apparently watching for them.

"We shall be back soon," said George, not giving him time to ask a question. "We intend taking a stroll—that's all."

The landlord made no reply, and the pair left the house.

They paused a moment in the street outside, uncertain where to go.

"Come," said Jonathan, "we will walk towards the City; if there are handbills out, they will surely be posted there."

"Or at Bow Street Police Station," said George.

"Yes, certainly there; but that would be running too much risk. Come on—come on!"

They strode forward rapidly in the darkness.

It was a night that favoured them exceedingly, for it was so disagreeable that no one would be abroad except upon necessity.

A bleak easterly wind was howling through the streets, and every now and then the rain would fall sharply; no doubt there would have been a complete downfall of it but for the violence of the wind.

The cold was intense—it seemed to pierce them through and through.

Ere going far, however, George exclaimed:

"Hush, guv'nor! Don't start or seem alarmed, but I have something particular to tell you."

"What is it—what is it?"

"Be calm!"

"How can I be calm? Tell me at once what it is, or my agitation will increase!"

Jonathan evidently apprehended some great danger, for he trembled from head to foot.

"I believe there's a man following in our footsteps," said George, calmly. "Whether he is or not I can scarcely say at present; but I have had my eyes open, guv'nor."

"What sort of a man does he seem?"

"I can hardly tell in the darkness. It is nothing more than a figure flitting behind us like a shadow. If I see him much longer I shall decide in my mind that he is a spy; if he is, then let him beware!"

Jonathan was thrown into a state of the utmost alarm by this revelation.

Unquestionably, both the powers of his body and mind were much shaken and enfeebled by all he had gone through.

He was no longer the bold, fierce, turbulent spirit that he had been.

George, however, possessed many of his father's characteristics, and on the present occasion he displayed one.

That was, perfect calmness and apparent indifference to the danger that threatened them.

"I will turn round three corners rapidly," said George, and if he follows us round the last I shall be convinced of what he is; then, I say, let him beware!"

"What shall you do, George?"

"I can hardly tell at present, guv'nor, I am thinking. Certainly, if I can, I will prevent him from interfering with our business any more."

The manoeuvre that Wild junior had projected was carried out.

Three successive corners were turned, and in such a way that they actually doubled upon their course, so that

it would be strange indeed if anyone was going in such a roundabout direction to any place.

Just as they were turning the second corner, Wild junior, by half turning his head, caught sight of the dark figure behind him.

The same took place at the third.

"Yes, guv'nor," he said, "he is a spy, and now I'll tell you how to settle him."

"How?"

"Increase your speed—keep up with me, and when I come to the next corner I will turn round it in such a way as to make the spy think we are about to run off. He will come round the corner hastily, and we will stop there waiting for him; when he does come he will remember me, I'll warrant!"

There was a tone of excessive malignity perceptible in Wild junior's voice as he thus spoke.

Jonathan saw at once how effectually the spy might be disposed of.

Accordingly, he quickened his steps as George had directed, and the two hastened along the street, not at a run certainly, but yet at a pace that could scarcely be considered a walk.

Then they came to a corner.

"Now, then, guv'nor, round it at full speed," said George, in suppressed tones, "and then stop as soon as ever you possibly can!"

This direction was obeyed implicitly.

They checked themselves as soon as they were able, and then George Wild, keeping close against the wall, so that its shadow should conceal him, crept back to the angle of the building, and waited for the spy to make his appearance.

CHAPTER DCLXXXIV.

JONATHAN WILD SEES A BILL OF A VERY DIFFERENT CHARACTER TO THE ONE HE WAS LOOKING FOR.

GEORGE WILD had not long to wait.

He clenched his teeth together.

The sound of rapid footsteps came upon his ears.

He threw back his cloak over his shoulders, so that it should not impede the free motion of his arm.

In his right hand he held a large pistol by the barrel.

The butt was of unusual size, and was massively bound with brass.

Closer and closer came the footsteps, and then he raised his arm in an attitude to strike.

Little dreaming of the danger that threatened him, and fully impressed with the idea that the fugitives were hastening along at the top of their speed, the spy came round the corner.

Wild junior had his arm raised in the air.

No sooner did the unfortunate man appear than the butt of the pistol descended with terrific force and accurate aim.

There was a dull, sickening sound—a low, gasping, gurgling cry, followed instantly by another blow, and then the spy fell in a huddled-up heap upon the pavement.

"He's settled," said George, quietly, as he restored the pistol to his belt. "Now, where can we put him out of the way, so that when he recovers he will not be able to create much disturbance.

"Will he recover?"

"I don't know. I should think so."

"They were two heavy blows, George."

"I know that; they were effectual ones, too. I rather think I have stopped his noise and his gallop at the same time."

George looked about him for some place where he could dispose of the body.

But for some time he looked in vain.

Then all at once his eye rested upon one of those iron gratings that are to be found at the corners of nearly all streets.

"Here, guv'nor," he said; "this is just the thing—help me!"

He strode towards the grating as he spoke.

"Now, then, put forth your strength; it's a good weight, I know, and not very convenient to grasp hold of; but we can manage it between us."

"Shall you put him down there, George?"

"Yes; why not? Perhaps the cold water at the bottom will revive him a little."

George laughed hideously at this pleasantry, and, bending down, he thrust his fingers in between the bars of the grating.

Jonathan did the like; and by their united efforts, they managed to raise the mass of iron and place it on the roadway.

"I think he is dead," said George, as he again bent over the prostrate form. "I only hope there are no marks about, and then people will wonder what on earth has become of him."

He seized hold of the unfortunate man by the feet, and thus dragged him to the hole the grating had covered.

He allowed his feet to fall down first, then, going round, he raised him by the shoulders, and, with a rush, he descended into the dark and loathsome pit.

There was a loud splash, and then silence.

"That is done!" said George. "Now, then, guv'nor, pick up the grating, and we will put it in its place again. Then the sooner we are off the better."

Jonathan was quite of this opinion, so he made all the haste he possibly could.

But while they were in the act of putting the grating into its proper place, they heard an approaching footstep.

Then round the corner of the street there came a watchman, holding his lantern as high as he could above his head, and endeavouring to see around him.

"It's a Charlie," said George, as he caught sight of him.

"Hullo!" cried the watchman, as he made out the two dusky figures near the edge of the pavement. "What are you doing there? Who are you? Speak at once, or I'll take you up!"

"It's all right," said George, walking up to him as calmly as anyone possibly could. "There's nothing the matter."

"But I say there is!" said the watchman. "I heard a cry. There's something amiss, and I insist upon keeping you both in charge?"

"Oh, do you? Then we don't intend to permit you to do anything of the kind!"

The watchman opened his mouth, and doubtless was about to utter something in a very loud voice—perhaps call for the assistance of some companion.

George was prepared for this extremity.

One hand was full of black, slimy mud that he had gathered up from the gutter.

As soon as the watchman opened his mouth in the manner we have recorded, he flung it in with full force.

He gasped, and struggled, and fought hard for breath—he was, indeed, in imminent danger of suffocation.

Before he could make use of it, George snatched the rattle from his hand.

"Now, then, guv'nor," he said, "off we go as fast as you like, and it's very odd to me if we have any intruders after us again!"

The watchman tried his utmost to call for assistance, but it was in vain.

The last Wild junior saw of him he was standing near the grating, spitting and spluttering, and making the greatest and most extraordinary exertions and contortions.

"Those two little adventures have quite warmed my blood, guv'nor," said George. "Now, then—come on! If we can only find the bill you spoke of, we shall be as right as the bank!"

They hurried on through several streets, looking about at various places Jonathan knew of, where bills were frequently posted up.

There were several to be seen making announcements of one sort or other, but not the one they were looking for.

"I'm afraid it's a case, guv'nor," said George. "We shall have to wait until the morning, and look in the paper. It's pretty certain no bills have been issued."

"There's one more place I should like to try."

"Where is that?"

"Temple Bar. If there is not one there, I shall conclude there is not one anywhere."

"You might almost conclude that now, guv'nor; but, however, we'll go there if you like."

To Temple Bar accordingly they went.

But here, as in the other places, no signs of such a bill could be seen.

"I am inclined to give up," said Jonathan. "I am losing all faith and confidence in the scheme, and yet how promising it looked at first!"

"Wait till the morning," said Wild junior—"we shall know more then—wait till the morning."

"But where shall we wait, that's the question; certainly it would not be prudent to go back to the inn where we have been staying."

"No, certainly not; but then our horses—what about them?"

"Ah! I had forgotten; we cannot do without them."

"True; and yet we must not sacrifice our lives for the best horses in the world. I told you I had my suspicions of the landlord, and it seems to me they were well grounded."

"You think he sent out that spy?"

"I am pretty sure of it. You may depend the police officers are waiting there in readiness to capture us as soon as we return."

There was a silence of several minutes' duration after this, that was broken by George Wild.

"Guv'nor."

"What?"

"As we are so near, I am more than half inclined to stroll past the station in Bow Street."

"No, it will be too dangerous."

"Not so—not so; the hour is late, there will scarcely be anyone about, and above all they would never think of looking for us in such a quarter as that; they would never think we had the boldness to go near it."

"There's a good deal in that," said Jonathan.

"There is—and what's more, we are more likely to see the bill we want stuck up against the wall of the station than anywhere else."

"I am well aware of that; but as I said before, I think the danger is too great."

"Well, guv'nor, but we have come so far in safety, and I think that ought to be an encouragement for us to think that we should not run into any additional peril by merely walking up Bow Street."

"Come on then, I am willing."

Bow Street was very close at hand, and they gained it in a short space of time.

In spite of their boldness and hardihood, they trembled a little as they approached thus the head quarters of the police.

All around them, however, was perfectly silent, no officers were in sight, and at the station they could only see the oil lamp that was burning over the doorway.

"Walk on boldly," said George—"don't shirk or tremble, or look about you as though you were in fear of capture; if you do, suspicion will be at once excited."

Jonathan could not altogether control his agitation, yet he tried hard to do so.

A few more steps took them past the door of the police station, and then they paused opposite the building.

As usual, a great many bills relating to such matters as they had come upon were exposed to view.

Suddenly Jonathan seized his son's arm with a convulsive grasp, and half uttered an exclamation.

"Look, George," he said—"look there—look there."

"Don't be a d—d fool, guv'nor, or you will spoil all. Look where?"

"Look at that bill—do you see it, that one with the large letters yonder? Just glance at it and then come away—we dare not stay here."

"What bill, guv'nor?"

"That one—can't you see it? Five hundred pounds reward. There are the letters and figures large enough. And look below—there's my name and yours; there's some smaller type between them. No doubt it's our description. Come away—come away at once, for if we should be seen we are lost."

"Or found," said George, with grim wit. "I see the bill now, guv'nor. Come away. I'm afraid it's all up with our scheme now!"

With hasty steps they made their way along the street, and at every step they took they drew a long breath of

relief, for they considered that they were so much further from great danger.

"D—n it, guv'nor!" cried Wild junior, "that's awkward enough—five hundred pounds reward—that's enough to tempt anyone, is it not? We must be doubly careful."

"We must, George—we must be careful! Oh, be careful, for my heart fails me!"

"Then if that's the case you are as good as taken and done for already."

"No—no."

"Cheer up, guv'nor—all is not lost yet. I will not believe that until the last moment! I would rather think that the time is come when we shall have our full revenge! Do you hear that word, guv'nor? Revenge—revenge!"

"Yes—I hear it," said Jonathan, "for the sound of it sends new life and new blood darting through my veins. Revenge—revenge! That shall be the word that I will always keep before me—revenge! I should like to glut my vengeance on the whole human race—I should like to have them all before me now—now!"

CHAPTER DCLXXXV.

JONATHAN AND HIS SON MAKE UP THEIR MINDS TO RUN THE RISK OF RETURNING TO THE INN.

JONATHAN WILD struck out with his arms fiercely, as though he imagined that the whole human race was before him as he had wished, and that he was actually gratifying his revenge.

"Keep still," said George—"keep still! What do you want to behave in that extravagant fashion for? Keep still, can't you?"

"I will be still—it is necessary to be cautious."

"It is highly necessary."

"But my feelings carried me away just then. I was anticipating the joys of revenge!"

"But, guv'nor—"

"What?"

"You have not forgot about our horses, have you?"

"No."

"What are we to do with them?"

Jonathan shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you made up your mind to abandon them?" continued George.

"Scarcely that, and yet it would be foolish in the extreme to run any great risk on their behalf."

"I don't know that, guv'nor. I am low in funds, and so are you, and what's more, they are a couple of first-rate animals."

"They are, indeed."

"And we want horses—must have horses, in fact!"

"Well—well, wait until to-morrow morning."

"And suppose we should not see the notice, as I'm afraid we shan't?"

"Well?"

"I hope we shall, but that hope must not be trusted to."

"It's a frail one, I admit."

"Then let us go to the public-house, and obtain our horses."

"But the officers are there."

"Perhaps."

"You may almost make sure of it; but if they are, we might outwit them if we tried, and when we were possessed of our horses we should be in a much better position to escape our foes should the notice not appear."

"But the risk—think of the risk!"

"I do think of it, but yet I think it worth while to make the effort."

"Agreed—then let it be done! Now, then, consider of the means."

A silence followed, during which the minds of both were busily at work devising some means by which they should be able to obtain possession of their horses.

In the hearts of both there was by this time considerable doubt as to whether any notice would be taken of their communication—both were, in fact, prepared for a disappointment.

Looking forward, then, to this disappointment, it was in the highest degree important that they should be in possession of their horses.

They had tried them, and found their quality to be excellent, and now they had had sufficient rest to recover entirely from the effects of their previous journey.

Neither Jonathan nor his son possessed anything like the amount of money that would be required to purchase two such steeds, nor was there any prospect of their being able to obtain such an amount.

Some time elapsed before either spoke, and then, at last, in an impatient voice, Jonathan said:

"Have you thought of anything, George?"

"Nothing very definite, guv'nor. Have you?"

"No, I have not."

"You were trusting to me I suppose?"

"I confess I was, George; the conviction comes more and more strongly over me that I am not what I once was, and that I shall never be able to recover my lost energy."

"Pooh—stuff! Do you mean to go on talking like that, guv'nor?"

"I can't help it."

"Well, then, I'll tell you what I would recommend."

"What?"

"Go straight up to Newgate, or to Bow Street if you like it better, and surrender yourself quietly; then you will save all further trouble or fuss."

"No—no!"

"You don't like the idea of doing that?"

"Not at all; I will fight it out to the last gasp—I will die rather than surrender!"

"That sounds better, guv'nor; I have more hopes of you now!"

"It has been prophesied that I should end my days upon the scaffold—that I should hang dangling from Tyburn Tree. I will disprove that prophecy. I can die—I will seek death in any form, but the officers shall never capture me—they shall never hang me up at Tyburn!"

"That's the spirit, guv'nor—you keep that sort of feeling warm in your breast, and you will be all right. We have much to do yet, guv'nor, and if this little scheme of ours fails, why, if we are careful, we shall be no worse off than we were before we thought of it, and we will let it be a warning to us—we will engage in no other transaction of the sort—we will bend all our energies to revenge."

It was wonderful what an inspiriting, revivifying effect the mere pronunciation of that one word had upon Jonathan Wild.

George noticed and knew it, and that was why he continued to harp upon the same word.

"But, guv'nor," he continued, "it is not the time exactly to think about revenge now; we must turn our attention instead to getting our horses out of that stable. Tell me how it is to be done."

"I can't George—I can't."

"Well, then, I'll tell you my thoughts."

"What are they?"

"It is my opinion that the landlord of that public-house, having his suspicions, called in the police, though his suspicions were not quite strong enough to be beyond a doubt. They might have guessed who we were without being certain of it."

"Well, well—what of all that?"

"You will see directly. That man they sent out to watch our footsteps. If we had merely taken a stroll and then returned to the inn, he would not have interfered with us, except by watching. When we were once in the building, they would be able to use their discretion."

"I see. Depend upon it, George, you are quite right in your suppositions."

"I think I am. The officers, finding that the spy does not return, will grow anxious. Perhaps they may send off one or two as scouts to learn intelligence, or they may abandon the inn altogether. In any case, however, I think we may manage to creep quietly in at the back premises, and, if there is no one about, saddle our horses and escape."

"We must go back, then, and see?"

"Yes. We will reconnoitre first."

"We have not very far to go, I think."

"No—only a few yards. Follow me, and I shall be able to take you to the back of the stables."

George Wild led the way, but before going to the back he walked past the front of the public-house, in order to

see whether it presented its usual appearance. He was as much gratified as astonished to find that the house was completely shut up, and that all the lights were extinguished.

Feeling more confident in his ability to obtain possession of the horses, he crept round to the rear of the premises.

Here, also, all was dark.

Making signs to Jonathan to be as cautious and quiet as he could, George stole on tiptoe towards the door of the stable.

He opened it gently.

But no sooner did he cross the threshold than he found himself firmly grasped by some one.

"Now, guv'nor," he said—"quick—help me!"

Not in the least did he lose his presence of mind.

He struck his assailant a violent blow, and then seized him tightly by the throat.

By this means he prevented him from uttering a cry that would doubtless have brought others to his aid.

In the stable there was a dim light feebly burning, and by the aid of this scanty illumination it was perceived that Wild junior's antagonist was no other than the ostler.

He was short and wiry-looking, and apparently quite a youth.

But he was gifted with considerable strength, and therefore George had much difficulty in obtaining the mastery.

But he managed to force the ostler back until he was close to the wall, and then, increasing the pressure on his throat, he shook him violently backwards and forwards, each time knocking his head with great violence against the wall.

The blows had a very alarming sound, but the ostler had a thick, hard skull, and withstood the effects of them astonishingly.

But in a few seconds he succumbed to the combined effects of them, and the combined effects of the pressure of Wild junior's fingers on his throat.

His hands gradually relaxed, and then he let his arms fall to his side, for he was powerless.

"Confound him!" said George. "What a trouble he has been! However, I won't hurt him, poor fellow, as he has done us no harm. Open that box, guv'nor—we will put him inside out of the way."

The box to which Wild junior alluded was a good-sized corn-bin.

Jonathan raised the lid, and immediately afterwards the unfortunate ostler was flung into it.

Already he showed signs of returning animation, so George hastily shut down the lid, and secured it by the hasp and staple with which it was furnished.

"There," he said—"he's all right. Now, guv'nor, the horses!"

Jonathan had not taken any part in this fray.

He not only saw that his son had only one antagonist to contend with, but also that he was a slim, thin fellow, who would doubtless be easily overcome.

Instead of interfering in this conflict he did the very best thing he could under such circumstances.

This was to run to the horses and begin to put on the saddles and bridles.

He had almost finished when George called to him to open the corn-bin.

He returned to his work immediately afterwards, and when the lid was secured and George turned round he saw that with the exception of a few buckles the process of harnessing the horses was quite complete.

Jonathan had indeed made the best use of his time.

"Now, guv'nor," he said, "I should think it's very likely that some of the police officers are waiting in the house."

"What makes you think that?"

"Why, if we had returned, and found the house shut up, they might have calculated that it would allay any suspicions we might have. The ostler was evidently told to watch for our arrival, and to raise the alarm if we attempted to enter the stable. That we have stopped; and if we can only manage to get away silently and unheard, we shall do very well indeed."

"But how is it to be done?"

"That's just the point. If we lead the horses ever so gently across the yard, their shoes must make a clatter on

those confounded stones, the officers would hear it, and then they would be after us in no time."

"But we should have the start," said Jonathan. "Come—come, be quick—the risk must be run!"

"Not at all," replied George—"not at all! I will tell you how we can get off without making the least sound, or without the officers being aware of our departure even if they should be listening for it."

"How—how?"

"Why, we will bind up the horses' feet with these haybands. Take one, and imitate me, for example."

"Capital," said Jonathan—"capital! That's a good thought of yours—a very good thought! We shall be able to get clear off unheard beyond all doubt."

"Of course we shall!" said George. "But make haste!"

CHAPTER DCLXXXVI.

JONATHAN WILD HAS A STARTLING AND TERRIBLE DREAM.

WILD junior set about binding up his horse's feet in a very scientific manner.

Jonathan watched him, and followed his example.

Behind the stable door were several haybands, and in a few moments the horses' feet were so well incased in these that they would be able to walk quite noiselessly.

"Now, then, guv'nor," said George, "we'd better mount inside the stable—you can bend your head and ride out easy enough. Now, then—quick!"

This order was obeyed.

George Wild placed the door ajar, so that when he was mounted he could open it easily.

"Are you ready, guv'nor?" he said.

"Yes, quite ready."

"Then follow me."

He flung open the door as he spoke, and crossed the yard at a rapid rate.

In some way or other one of the bandages got loose, and the consequence was that a sharp, clattering sound broke upon the silence.

Wild junior uttered a curse.

"Come on!" he said. "We are found out now to a certainty!"

He clapped spurs to his steed while he spoke, and so did Jonathan.

They rode full speed out of the yard into the street.

There was an immediate uproar.

The back door of the inn was instantly thrown open, and several police officers appeared.

They rushed out into the yard, but were too late to accomplish their purpose.

The two villains had gone, and they could only hear the dull strokes of their horses' feet in the distance.

The rage of the police may be imagined, and it was under the influence of their angry passions that they saddled their horses and rode off in pursuit, though, had they given the matter a little calm consideration, they might have known that it would have been totally impossible to effect a capture.

"That was what I call a narrow squeak, guv'nor," said George, as, finding they were free from all pursuit, he gently pulled in his horse. "There's no occasion to break your neck now, guv'nor; we are out of danger."

"It was a narrow escape!" Jonathan replied. "And where shall we go now, George?"

"Well, we will think a little. In the first place, we ought to consider ourselves very lucky indeed in having obtained possession of our horses with so little trouble."

"I do; but I mean, what is to be our next step?"

"It can't be very far from morning, guv'nor. Suppose we wait about where we are for a time, keeping quiet, and then, when it is fairly daylight, we will obtain a paper. I have not lost all hope yet."

Jonathan shook his head.

"Well, you may have done so—I don't dispute it."

"I have, George. It will be very dangerous to attempt to obtain a paper, and I really do not think it will be worth while to encounter that danger."

"I do; it is most important that we should know for certain one way or the other. However, yonder seems to be a building of some sort. Let us conceal ourselves there, and wait till morning."

Wild and his son were then on the outskirts of London,

and the building he pointed to was either a house that was partially built, or else one that was falling to decay; which of the two it might be could not be ascertained in the darkness.

Towards this building, however, they made their way.

"It's a ruin, guv'nor," said George. "I suppose the people lived in it as long as they could, and then ran away for fear it should tumble about their ears."

"Will it be safe to enter?"

"Oh yes—come on; I'm not afraid."

George entered the house boldly, though certainly it required no inconsiderable amount of courage to do so.

The whole place seemed in a frightfully dilapidated state, and as though it would require only the least thing in the world to bring down the edifice with a tremendous crash.

The horses were led in and secured to some upright posts of timber that had been used to support the floor above.

Then Wild and his son flung themselves down upon the floor, resolved to wait till morning.

At last, to their infinite satisfaction, the sun rose.

George Wild went to the door of the ruined house and looked around him.

He saw no one, nor was there a single habitation in sight.

"We're snug enough here, guv'nor," he cried; "we've only to wait a little longer, and then we will start for London. It's no good starting at present, I am sure."

"It's not worth while to run such a fearful risk," said Jonathan; "the more I think of it the more sure do I feel."

"I don't care how you feel, guv'nor. I've made up my mind to this course, and let what will be the consequence, I will adopt it."

"Well, then, I refuse."

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

"Well, you are welcome to do so. I don't want you to come with me—in fact, now I give the subject a second thought, I feel sure that I shall be more likely to succeed, and certainly be much safer if I am alone. You stop here where you are, guv'nor, and wait till I come back."

This proposition was scarcely agreeable to Jonathan, for there was nothing he disliked so much as being left entirely alone. Any society, no matter what, was preferable to solitude.

But now that George had taken this idea in his head he would not be turned from it—he clung to it with his characteristic pertinacity.

When the time came for him to set out, Jonathan anxiously entreated him to allow him to go too.

But George was inexorable.

"No, no," he said—"it would only be to redouble the danger and the chances of detection."

"I can't see that."

"But I can, and that's much more to the point. The officers now know that we are together, and will be looking for the pair of us, therefore it is clear that one will stand a much better chance of escaping undetected than the two."

But Jonathan would not be convinced.

George, however, firmly refused to take him.

"Stay here," he said—"you will be perfectly safe—no one will come near to disturb you. I shall not be long away, and when I return I shall bring the paper with me."

Once more enveloping himself in his large cloak, George Wild took his seat on the back of his steed and rode away.

Jonathan watched him with wishful eyes, and longed to set out too.

It may seem strange that he did not gratify this inclination, but George had assumed great power and mastery over him, so that he shrank from setting him at defiance.

Oh! what a miserable time it was for him while his son was absent.

The day wore on, the sun rose higher and higher in the sky, but yet he perceived no signs of his return.

Once or twice, when looking from the doorway, Jona-

than had seen people moving about, and their appearance alarmed him.

No one, however, came near his hiding-place.

For some reason all seemed to shun it.

Jonathan looked round and round at the crumbling, decaying walls, and wondered how it was that the place was thus left to decay.

Nothing that he had seen was calculated to afford him any information on this subject.

At length, worn out with speculations and with watching, he sank back upon the flooring, and fell fast asleep.

At first it was the sleep of sheer fatigue, but as soon as nature had to some extent refreshed herself, his brain began to work.

Then the most horrible visions and dreams that could possibly be conceived flitted before the mind of Jonathan Wild.

What he endured under these circumstances can never be described.

But could it have been known what his feelings were, all would have considered that such sleep-y visitations were almost sufficient punishment for all he had done.

He writhed about in his sleep upon the floor of the ruined house, for then he was dreaming that he was attacked by an overwhelming force of police officers, and that he was struggling frantically and furiously with them, but to no effect.

Large drops of perspiration coursed down his face, brought forth by the tremendous exertions he was compelled to make.

He groaned fearfully, and his struggles grew fainter and fainter.

He felt himself being gradually overpowered—the officers were gaining the victory.

Then he was bound securely with many thongs, and taken back to his old quarters in Newgate.

Everything was so vivid that it was not possible to conceive it to be anything but stern reality.

Then Jonathan was so familiar with Newgate and with all that was done to convicted felons, that, in imagination, he was easily able to go through it all.

He was taken from the condemned cell to the press-yard, and there he was pinioned.

Then placed in the cart, and the ride to Tyburn commenced.

He could see the thousands of faces on both sides of him.

He could hear their yells and imprecations upon him.

Then, last of all, he could see the triple tree at Tyburn.

He was taken beneath it, and then the hangman shook him roughly to make him stand upon his feet while the noose was adjusted round his neck.

But at the last awful moment Jonathan thought he would make a struggle for his life.

He grappled with the hangman, and the two swayed backwards and forwards in the cart.

Then Jonathan experienced some sharp blows, causing him exquisite pain.

Then a voice cried loudly in his ears:

"Get up, you d—d old fool—get up! What are you fighting on the ground like that for?—get up! Oh! you won't?—then take that, d—n you!"

CHAPTER DCLXXXVII.

WILD JUNIOR AND JONATHAN STILL CLING TO THEIR SCHEME IN THE HOPE OF BEING ABLE TO OBTAIN A FREE PARDON.

JONATHAN WILD awoke.

He opened his eyes and looked up.

Then he saw standing over him the form of his son George.

"Oh! the last kick did the business, guv'nor, did it? Well, now then, sit up. What's the matter?"

Jonathan slowly raised himself to a sitting posture.

His dreams were mixed up with realities, and for a moment or so he could scarcely separate one from the other.

"What's the matter with you?" said his son again, impatiently. "D—n me, if I don't believe you have gone

mad at last! I always thought you would some day or other!"

"No, no—George! I'm not mad—I'm all right now!"

"Well, I'll be d—d if you look as if you were, that's all!"

"I am—I am!"

"Then get up!"

"In a moment, George—but—but——"

"But what?"

"I have had such fearful dreams—frightful, horrible dreams!"

"Bah!—stuff!"

"But I tell you I have, George. If you could form any idea of what they were like, you would not speak in that contemptuous fashion—nothing could be more terrible. In my sleep I have died a thousand deaths!"

"More fool you, then!" was the consolation his son gave him. "Why don't you keep awake?"

"I got tired of waiting for you. But the result, George—ah! now I recollect!—what's the result?"

Wild junior, instead of replying, broke forth into a torrent of the most frightful oaths and imprecations.

In this accomplishment he even rivalled his worthy parent.

"I thought as much," said Jonathan—"I thought as much."

"I know you did, you old croaker!"

"And you saw a paper?"

"Yes, d—n it, and it very nearly cost me my life! I bought one, but was recognised, and I had to fly for my life. However, it's not a bit of good talking about that; you see I am here, safe and sound, so that must be sufficient."

"And no notice was taken of my letter?"

"Oh yes, there was!"

"What notice?"

"Why, not the kind you expect—I can assure you of that."

"What then?"

"Why, there was a large advertisement in it, doubling the reward that you saw was offered for us. It was equally divided—five hundred for me and five hundred for you."

"Did you read it at all?"

"Not I. I flung the paper away in disgust. A few lines at the bottom did, however, catch my eye."

"And what were they?"

"To this effect, that the authorities had very good grounds for supposing and believing that we were both concealed somewhere in London, and urging the police officers to make diligent search after us."

"Then we will disappoint them," said Jonathan. "Let us ride off at once."

"We will directly, but we may as well wait a little longer."

"No, no—at once—now, at once!"

"Not just at present. Look here, guv'nor—see what I have brought!"

George produced a small packet of provisions.

Jonathan looked at them hungrily.

"Where did you get these?" he asked.

"Never mind where I got them,—they are here, and let that content you."

"I am very hungry."

"So am I—I have eaten nothing since I left you. We will just devour this, and then off we go."

It was only a small packet that Wild junior had brought, and therefore it quickly disappeared.

"Now, George," said Jonathan, "which way shall we turn our steps now?—what shall we do?"

"I have been thinking about that, guv'nor, all the way back, and I have come to a conclusion."

"What is it? Let me hear it."

"The conclusion is, that the reason why no notice was taken of your letter was really because they do not believe in the truth of the statements made in it."

"I have thought that myself."

"Oh, have you? Well, now you see the disadvantage of being an infernal liar. You speak the truth, and, as a matter of course, you are not believed."

"But do you think that if they had believed it it would have made any difference?"

"Yes, certainly it would, and for that reason I don't feel inclined to abandon our project."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, we have failed at present, but yet we have only failed partially, not utterly."

"I can't understand you."

"You will in a moment. The means we have tried have failed, but yet I fancy that if we are speedy and resolute there yet remains the means which we first decided upon."

"Do you mean the capture of the Pretender?"

"I do. If we can get back to the farm-house before he leaves it, I think we shall stand a very good chance of achieving our purpose."

"How so?"

"We must be on the watch, and no doubt some opportunity will present itself of which we can make use. If we can once seize upon him we will drag him away, and bring him in triumph to London. Then when we have really and truly surrendered him to the authorities, and when it is known that we, by ourselves, captured him, the Government, instead of giving us the reward in money that is offered for anyone who will make the Pretender prisoner, will pardon us."

"There does seem great plausibility in what you say, George, so far as I can judge. I feel certain that the Government will pardon us, or anyone else, no matter what they may have done, who could bring the Pretender a prisoner."

"Yes—that would cancel everything," said George. "The King, I am sure, is only anxious to find some pretext for keeping him safe prisoner in the Tower. This would give him good grounds for such a course, and when the head of the Jacobites was under lock and key, he would cease to feel those alarms that now so much disturb him."

"Well, we will try it, George," said Jonathan, with a little of his old energy perceptible in his manner. "We can but fail after all, and if we do we cannot make our position worse than it is at present."

"True. That's the way I want you to look at it, guv'nor. In this affair we have nothing to lose but everything to gain, so let us use our utmost exertions to win."

"We will—we will, George. I will back you up in everything."

"If you do—if you are half so bold, and courageous, and resolute as you used to be in former times, we shall certainly capture this Charles Stuart. We will make a triumphant entry into London then, guv'nor, and you will once more take up your quarters in Newgate Street."

"No, no—not there," said Jonathan, hastily, in whose ears the very name of Newgate now had a most unpleasant sound—"not there!"

"Well, in any other part of London you may think proper. I am not going to dispute with you about it."

"Let us start, George," said Jonathan. "I am all impatience to commence this undertaking! Come on!"

"I am ready. I have every hope of success, and while that hope continues all will be well."

"But, George, should we be disappointed—should things turn out differently to the way we expect, the disappointment will be more than I can bear."

"Pooh!—rubbish! Don't think about disappointment or failure; keep nothing but success in view!"

"You are right, George—and I will do so. Are you ready?"

"Quite ready. It seems to be growing dark at an earlier hour than usual this evening, as though nature would favour us in what we have to do. Every half-hour is of importance now."

"Yes, yes! Do not hesitate any longer, George—forward—forward!"

Wild junior was as much surprised as he was pleased to find that Jonathan was so impatient and determined.

Without further delay they rode out of the ruined house, and took their way as nearly as possible in a straight line to the place they wished to reach.

A very long ride was before them, but yet they thought nothing of that.

They had good horses under them that were well fitted to perform such a journey.

"Take it easy at first, guv'nor," said George, as he per-

ceived Jonathan spurring his horse violently—"take it easy at first—we shall gain time in the end!"

"I ought to know that," said Jonathan, tightening the rein—"but I am so impatient—so anxious."

"I know you are, guv'nor, and believe me I rejoice to see it."

At a rapid rate, yet without particularly distressing their horses, Wild and his son continued their journey.

They rode on almost without stopping until sunrise the next morning.

The horses then began to show great signs of exhaustion and fatigue.

The only time when they had allowed them to diminish their speed was when ascending a hill of more than usual steepness.

Upon gaining the summit, they had allowed them to stand for a few moments to recover wind a little, and then they had urged them to the top of their speed again.

Just about the time when the business of the day was commencing, they reached a small public-house, for in those days wayside inns were much more plentiful than they are now, and did a much better business.

From the remote nature of this dwelling, Jonathan and his son both thought that they should be in little danger of detection.

Assuming a swaggering and important air, they asked whether they could be accommodated for a few hours.

Of course a reply in the affirmative was given them.

Their horses were stabled, and they were shown into a tolerably-well furnished room.

Here refreshments were placed before them.

"We won't ask for a bed, guv'nor," said George, "although we are so weary; there's a sofa yonder—lie down on that for an hour or so and get a little sleep; I will watch the while, and then have a nap afterwards."

"No, no, George—you sleep and I will watch; believe me, I tremble with dread at the bare idea of having to close my eyes again. What I suffered in my last dream I could not possibly express."

"Well, well—just as you like, guv'nor. I paid you the compliment of asking you first. I think I am more entitled to rest than you, for I have had no sleep at all since we left the inn in London."

So saying, Wild junior flung himself at full length on the sofa he had mentioned, and, after several times enjoining Jonathan to keep a good watch, and on no account to close his eyes, he sank off into a profound slumber.

CHAPTER DCLXXXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON SET OUT FOR THE FARM-HOUSE.

GEORGE WILD was allowed to slumber peacefully for several hours—that is, till he awoke.

He stared around him.

Jonathan was seated near the window, anxiously looking out, but yet in such a position that he could not be seen by anyone outside.

"Hallo!" said George. "Anything amiss, guv'nor?"

"No—nothing."

"That's right! Now take your turn, and when it is dark we will start."

"Let us go now."

"No—you must wait rest. Besides, it will not be safe for us to travel in the daytime."

Jonathan threw himself on the couch which his son had just quitted.

He was afraid to sleep.

After awhile, however, his eyes closed unconsciously.

The two villains were fortunate in the place they had selected for their halt.

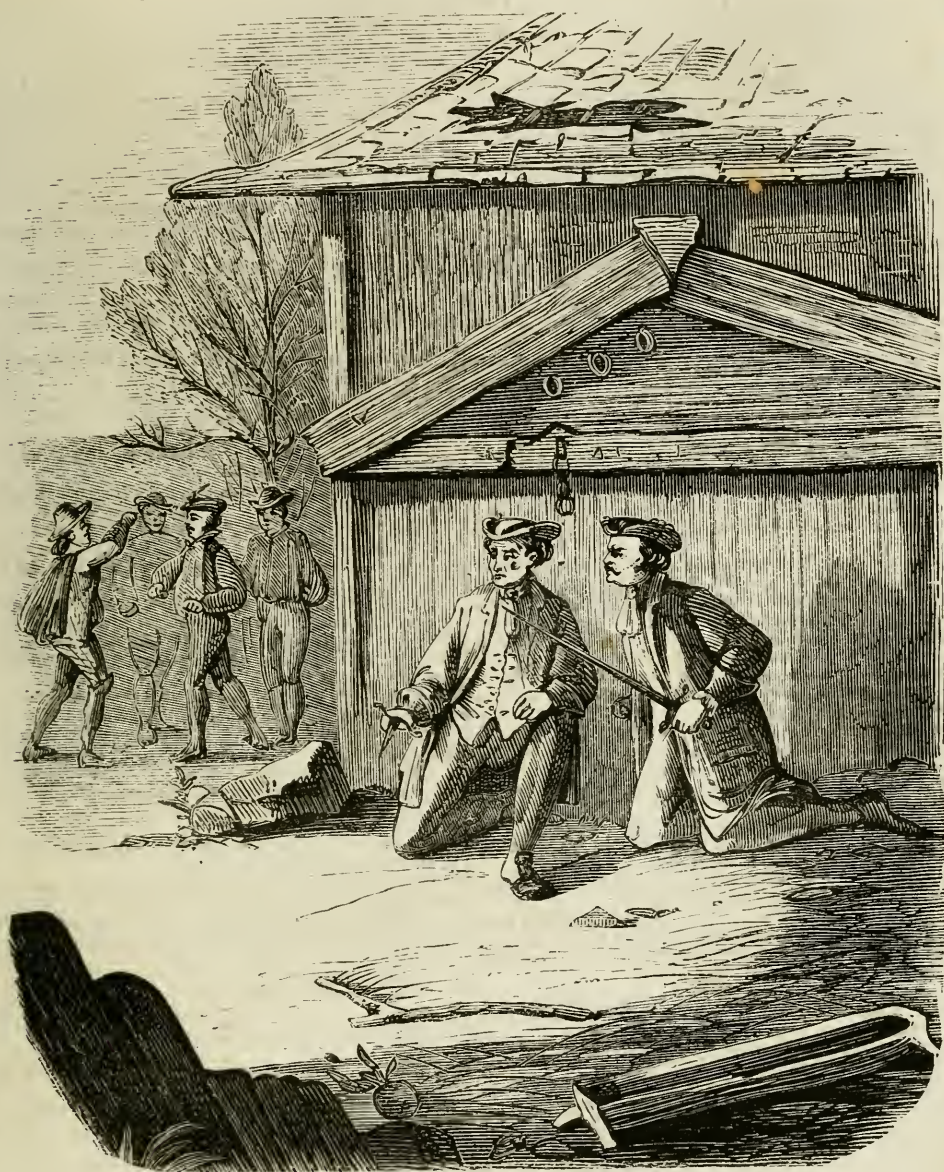
It was in a very retired situation, and though Wild junior sat at the window for several hours, he saw no one.

The inmates of the dwelling evidently did not suspect their character.

All was well.

On this occasion, those dreams which made sleep a terror to Jonathan did not fail to exert their influence.

To such a pitch did they eventually reach that he writhed and groaned like one in great agony.



[JONATHAN WILL AND HIS SON WATCHING THE CONSPIRATORS.]

His son sat for some time watching him with curious eyes.

At length, however, he arose and shook Jonathan violently.

"Wake up," he said—"wake up, and don't make that d—d row any longer! You will frighten all the people in the house! It's enough to make them think some one is murdering you!"

Jonathan gazed about him vacantly for a moment or two.

He was unable to realise exactly where he was.

At last his recollection returned to him.

He said:

"Thanks—thanks, George—a thousand thanks for arousing me from that dreadful slumber! What I suffered you cannot by any possibility imagine! It was fearful!"

And Jonathan shuddered at the remembrance.

No. 146.—BLUESKIN.

"You must be in a nice state of mind, guv'nor."

"I am—I am! I shall never dare to close my eyes again! If you see me falling off into a slumber, let me implore you to arouse me, and save me from this torment!"

"But you must sleep, guv'nor—you must sleep!"

Jonathan knew this, and his head was racked by a violent pain.

He clasped his hands over his temples, and fell back again upon the sofa, and then such a feeling of unutterable wretchedness and misery came over him that he wished his career on earth would come to a termination.

This state of mind did not last long, however.

Springing up, he cried:

"It's brandy I want, George—burnt brandy! I have not had enough of it lately, and that's why my system is out of order. Brandy—brandy!"

"Well, don't make such a row about it, guv'nor. I will call the landlord."

The landlord was accordingly summoned, and brandy brought.

Jonathan had not the patience on this occasion to put into practice his favourite process, but he drank off the brandy just as it was.

The quantity he swallowed made even his son stare. Then Jonathan drew a long breath.

"Ah," he said, "I feel better now—much better!"

"I shouldn't wonder," said George.

"I do—I do! I feel fresh life and strength within me!"

"Well, I tell you what it is—I could never have believed that you or anyone else could drink so much raw brandy at one draught. It was enough to kill you!"

"No," said Wild—"I was low-spirited, and this has put me right. How long will it be before it is dark enough for us to start?"

"Not long now," said George—"in fact, I think, as it is growing dark, we might venture to start at once."

"Come on, then!" said Wild, in a loud voice, for the brandy seemed to have imparted to him a great deal of his original courage and resolution.

"Don't make a row," said George. "We may as well be quiet. This inn is in such a lonely spot that I question whether we shall see anyone until long after we have left it behind us."

"Let us call the landlord and have the horses got ready."

This was done, and in a quarter of an hour afterwards Wild and his son were again in the saddle, galloping towards the farm-house in which the unfortunate Charles Stuart had taken refuge.

Such good speed did they make that they arrived at their destination while the night was yet young.

They halted a considerable distance from the farm-house, being fully impressed with the necessity of advancing with the greatest caution.

It was probable that sentries had been posted in different places, in order to give warning in case anything of an unusual character should occur.

But they were by no means certain that the prince was still there.

He might by this time have changed his quarters.

Wild and his son left their horses in a little plantation.

Plenty of grass was growing around, so that they would be all right so far as that was concerned.

They were secured by one rein to the branch of a tree, so as to prevent them from straying away.

Then, cautiously and on foot, Wild and his son crept towards the farm.

The night was dark and inclined to be stormy.

The wind, that blew in sudden and fitful gusts, was sufficient to drown any ordinary sound.

They concealed themselves by creeping forward almost on their hands and knees.

Their progress was slow, but it was sure.

Finally, having reached some of the outbuildings belonging to the farm, they stopped to reconnoitre.

A sound resembling that produced by footsteps had struck upon their ears, and they were anxious to learn who it was that was near them.

Stepping forward on tiptoe, they peeped round the angle of the building, and then perceived the figures of several men standing together in a group.

In the darkness they were scarcely visible, but Wild and his son both had keen eyes, and they distinguished them tolerably well.

These men were evidently holding a consultation with each other, but the two listeners could form no idea whatever of its character, for they spoke in such low tones that not even the murmur of their voices reached them.

To have attempted to approach any nearer would have been highly dangerous, so they were forced to content themselves with remaining where they were.

The figure of one man, who seemed to take a prominent part in the discussion, appeared familiar to Wild junior, and he was not long in recognising it as that of the man who was in charge of the whole expedition.

"It would be a bad thing if they saw us lurking about here, guv'nor," he said. "We must be particularly care-

ful, for if they found us they would most certainly put an end to our lives."

"Yes," said Jonathan; "but don't speak, for fear some one may be near enough to overhear you."

"A very good caution, guv'nor; but I wish I could make out what those fellows yonder are talking about."

"It is impossible. We must content ourselves by watching their movements."

The conference, whatever it was about, lasted for a long time—so long as to try the patience of the two eavesdroppers considerably.

Judging from the gestures made use of by them, they were unable to come to a decision upon some important point.

But eventually this was decided, and, shaking hands with each other, they separated.

About half of them struck across the fields, and the remainder bent their steps in the direction of the farm-house.

This was only a few yards distant from where Wild and his son were concealed, and, in fact, if they had gone round the angle of the building, a dozen steps would have taken them to the door at which they first solicited admittance.

George watched the men as far as he could, and then, turning to Jonathan, he said:

"It's pretty clear that the prince is still concealing himself in this place."

"Yes," said Jonathan, "there is no doubt of that, and you may depend the reason why he is doing so is that those who promised to come forward and assist him have failed to do so."

"That's about it, guv'nor, and I should not be surprised to see him make his way with all speed to Ostend again. I think it far more likely he would do that than advance towards London. In either case, we must try our best to make him prisoner."

"If we can only accomplish that, and carry him to London, we shall be able to dictate our own terms."

"Yes, guv'nor, if we can only accomplish that we shall be all right."

"Quite right; but come a little closer. Now that these men have gone, there is no longer the necessity to remain just here."

"Where would you go?"

"Follow me round this corner. I think then we shall be able to watch the house itself."

This was done, and for some moments Wild and his son stood gazing at the farm-house in silence.

"It's a difficult job, guv'nor, that we have set ourselves, and now we are on the ground I can scarcely see how it is to be done."

"Think—think."

"Yes, it's all very fine to say that, but, you see, we dare not show our faces to anyone here. If we did, they would be down upon us as traitors."

"True."

"Well, then, let me ask you, what chance have we of getting near to the prince at all?"

"He will have a body-guard around him, doubtless, for the greater part of the time, but then, when he retires to rest—"

"Yes, I should say he would be alone then."

"Of course he would, but then there's one little difficulty in the way of that."

"What is it?"

"How are we to find out which room he occupies?"

"Well, it must be done somehow. If we could only find him in his bedchamber alone, and enter it unheard and unseen, we would threaten him, and compel him to follow us quietly."

"I like the plan. I confess I like the plan."

There was some further discussion on this topic, and then they observed lights flitting about in the upper part of the farm-house.

This seemed to show that the inhabitants were retiring for the night.

In the hope that such was the case, Wild and his son fixed their eyes intently upon the windows.

Half an hour elapsed, and at the end of that time nearly all the lights had been extinguished.

"Now, guv'nor," said Wild junior, "this is the chance to try our luck. Do you see that kind of wooden gallery yonder?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, we must climb up into that; we shall then be able to peep into several rooms, and perhaps we shall find the one that we want."

"I hope so."

"Come, then—follow me quietly and cautiously. I am pretty certain there are no sentinels about to observe our movements."

Like shadows, Wild and his son crept along towards the east front of the farm-house.

Along this ran a kind of balcony or gallery.

It was very rude in its construction, and was perhaps intended more for ornament than use.

The woodwork of which it was composed was of curious shape, and it was overgrown by various kinds of climbing plants.

It was the easiest matter in the world to climb up on to such a balcony as this.

The only fear was whether it had been made strong enough to sustain the weight of two men.

That could only be decided by the actual experiment.

George felt nervous as he found the woodwork creak beneath his weight.

He climbed up with great agility, however, and then stood on the flat roof above.

Jonathan ascended next.

The wood cracked several times, but yet not alarmingly, and it was scarcely likely that so slight a sound would be taken any notice of by those within.

George was able to render assistance to his father, and in a few seconds they were both crouching down upon the balcony and listening.

There was a window close to them on their left hand, and through this they at length ventured to peep.

A dim light was burning in this room, and by the aid of it they saw the figure of a man seated in a chair that was drawn up close before the fire.

His face was buried in his hands, and, from his immovable position, he was either asleep or else deeply plunged in meditation.

CHAPTER DCLXXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON FAIL IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE THE PRETENDER.

It was some moments before they could make out this figure distinctly, owing to the dimness of the light; in fact, there was no lamp, and the fire had burned low.

A little blaze would every now and then shoot up fitfully from the dark mass of embers, and it was only at these times that the two watchers could see.

They made out, however, that this person was attired richly, although plainly.

They could see the sparkle of several jewels about his person, and at length they came to the conclusion that it must be no other than Charles Stuart that they beheld.

His attitude and manner seemed to favour this idea.

He looked like one in deep grief and sorrow.

Perhaps he was thinking how all his hopes had been dashed to the ground, for this enterprise, of which he had been led to think much, had turned out an utter failure.

He could no longer disguise the fact from his mind, and but for the obstinacy of his adherents he would have made all speed to the coast and put off to sea again.

After gazing for some time, George touched Jonathan upon the arm and retreated to a little distance.

"Guv'nor," he said, "that's the Pretender—I am sure of it."

"I think so," said Jonathan.

"Yes, yes—I am sure of it. Fortune favours us in a most extraordinary manner. One bold stroke, and our object is achieved."

"But how is that bold stroke to be taken?"

"We must endeavour to enter the room unseen. If we can only pounce suddenly upon him, the sight of a pistol will prevent him from giving the alarm."

"Very likely."

"I am sure of it. Get your weapons ready, and be prepared to follow me."

George Wild again crept back to the window.

Peeping through, he saw that the man still occupied the same position.

A difficult portion of his work was now before him.

Could he open the window so noiselessly as not to attract the attention of the inmate of the room?

George took a small knife from his pocket and resolved to try.

The gusty wind of which we have already spoken now greatly increased in vehemence, and it howled round the farm-house in such a manner as to make it difficult to hear anything else.

With the blade of this knife George gently bent back the lead in which the panes of glass were fixed.

Then taking hold of the piece of glass itself, he gently drew it out.

So very silent had he been in doing this that not the least alarm had been given.

The figure was still sitting before the fire, and doubtless it would require a very loud sound indeed to arouse him from his abstraction.

Now that this pane was removed, it was perfectly easy for George Wild to introduce his hand and arm.

The fastening of the window was close by.

It was of simple construction, being nothing else than a button.

This he turned gently and slowly round.

He slowly withdrew his hand.

All he had to do then was to open the window as gently and silently as he could.

Inch by inch he pushed it open, and then with a sudden dash he sprang into the room and placed a pistol at the head of the figure.

"One word," he said, "one movement, and I fire—nothing can save you!"

The man removed his hands from his face and looked about him vacantly.

He had evidently been sleeping, not thinking.

"Come," said George—"rise—follow us—resist at your peril!"

Jonathan placed himself on the other side and pointed another pistol.

"What do you wish with me?" he asked, quietly—"who are you?"

The sound of the voice gave George a very uncomfortable sensation.

He kicked the fire with his foot and caused it to blaze up brightly.

Then he saw that the person he had seized was not the prince, though probably he was one of his followers.

An expression of great disappointment came over both Wild and his son upon making this discovery, and the man took the utmost advantage of it.

With a sudden movement he sprang aside, and then, perceiving that the window was open, rushed out upon the balcony before they could prevent him.

"Help—help!" he cried, in loud and startling tones.

"Treachery—treachery!"

There was an immediate uproar.

"Curse it!" said George, "we have failed, and we shall have to fly! It is no good—to remain here any longer would be madness! Come, follow me!"

He rushed to the window as he spoke, and lowered himself down from the balcony in a manner that made it appear as though he was perfectly reckless as to personal consequences.

Jonathan followed him, but not so quickly.

Scarcely did they reach the ground, however, before they found that the whole of the farm-house was in a perfect uproar.

Lights were flashing in all directions, and several people hastily attired rushed out upon the balcony, wondering what was the matter.

"There they go—there they go!" cried the one who had given the alarm. "Pursue them—pursue them! Their intention is to assassinate the prince!"

A shout of rage and execration followed this announcement.

Rapidly descending from the balcony, a considerable number of the prince's attendants commenced a pursuit.

But Wild and his son had already got a good start, which, under those circumstances, was a great advantage.

Convinced that there was no longer any hope of accomplishing their purpose, they ran with might and main towards the spot where they had left their horses.

If they could only manage to gain them without being overtaken they could bid their pursuers defiance.

But a dense throng came hurrying after them.

Not only were their breasts filled with a desire to have vengeance upon those who had sought to assassinate their prince, but they were also anxious to overtake them because of the fear that they would betray them to the Government.

But Wild and his son knew that they were running for their lives, and therefore made incredible exertions.

They maintained the advantage they had gained at first, and at length, panting for breath, they plunged among the trees.

So well had they noted the spot where they had left their steeds that they made their way in a direct line to the exact spot.

To unfasten the rein and to mount was but the work of a moment.

Then they started off at a terrific gallop that soon left the farm-house and the Pretender's followers far behind.

When they found that they were no longer in the least danger of pursuit, Wild and his son pulled up their horses, and for several moments indulged in some violent language.

After this explosion their wrath cooled down a great deal.

"Lost!" said Jonathan—"that chance now is wholly and entirely lost! We shall never indulge in that hope again—we shall never have so good an opportunity of obtaining a pardon!"

"I don't agree with you, guv'nor," said George—"all is not lost yet. We will keep close to these Jacobites, and if any favourable opportunity occurs we will avail ourselves of it."

"No, no—let us give up the scheme at once!"

"But why should we? It's worth while to make an effort. After this discovery, they will, of course, make direct for the sea-shore and get on board. When once upon the water they will be beyond our reach, but until then we will be on the watch."

"It's a forlorn hope, George."

"Well, it may be, but yet it is a hope. There's a chance that we may yet succeed in our design, and if so, why, then our triumph will be all the greater."

Jonathan shook his head despondingly.

"Don't give up, guv'nor. I mean to keep up my heart to the last, for I know what a good thing this will be to us."

"What will be your next movement?"

"Why, to retrace our steps, as far as may be prudent. We will watch the farm-house, and see whether the prince and his followers leave it."

"There can be no danger in doing that."

"None whatever."

"Come on, then, or perhaps they may get too great a start of us."

They turned their horses' heads round, and once more advanced to the farm-house.

Their pursuers, finding they had horses, had given up the pursuit entirely.

They had by this time reached the farm-house again.

After going as far as they thought was prudent, Wild and his son paused to make their observations.

By the manner in which the house was illuminated, they could tell that considerable excitement was going on within.

Then, in a short time, they heard the trampling of horses' feet.

"I was right!" said George. "Look—they are beginning their flight already!"

"How soon!"

"Yes, they are thoroughly alarmed, and the kingdom will hear no more about this conspiracy without we should happen to succeed in capturing the Pretender."

From where they stood, they saw the dark forms of men and horses moving rapidly about, and then, after a brief delay, quite a large troop was mustered.

Then they all set forward in an irregular, straggling line.

As soon as they started, Wild and his son started too.

They followed as closely in the rear as they dared, and continued to do so until daybreak.

Then they perceived that the prince was riding in the centre, and that all the others were clustered around him.

Knowing that there was a plot to assassinate him, they were extremely vigilant and alert.

"I have a good mind to give it up, guv'nor, after all," said George, when he saw it. "The Pretender's fears are aroused, at any rate, and rely upon it he will take good care to keep as many of his followers round him as he possibly can."

"Yes," said Wild. "We might manage to pick him off with a bullet, and even that would be difficult."

"And not only that," said George, "but if we did it our purpose would not be answered."

"Not at all."

"Do you agree to abandon the enterprise, then?"

"Yes."

Jonathan sighed, for, in spite of what he had said, it seemed that up to that moment he had indulged in the hope of being able to succeed.

"What's to be done now?" he asked—"what shall be our next step?"

"I have already arranged that in my mind," said George.

"What is it?"

"Why, I hinted my purpose to you some time ago. We have another hold upon safety besides this one which has just failed us—a much better hold;—not one, perhaps, that would produce such good results as concerns ourselves, and yet in the end it might even be better."

"But what do you mean?" said Jonathan. "Why do you not speak out plainly?"

"Is it possible that you do not comprehend the meaning of my allusions? Of course, I refer to no other than the heiress. You remember now what I said? We will find out where she is—we will make her a prisoner, carry her off, and then we shall be able to dictate our own terms."

CHAPTER DCXC.

REVERTS TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD, AND RELATES WHAT BEFEL THEM IN THEIR SEARCH AFTER JONATHAN WILD.

We will now leave Jonathan and his son for awhile, as it is high time we returned to the proceedings of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

When we left them last was, as will be remembered, just when they came in sight of the empty house in which Jonathan had taken refuge, and in which such terrible events had occurred.

There was something in the appearance of this building that made them believe it would be just the place where Jonathan would try to hide himself from his pursuers.

Going there, however, they could glean no information whatever.

Their repeated peals upon the bell were totally disregarded.

"If there is no one here," said Jack, "who can give us information, it is scarcely worth while for us to enter."

"I don't know that," said Blueskin. "If the house, is as I take it, completely deserted, we might be able, by going in, to ascertain whether the villain had stayed in it or not."

"True; but assuming that he had, what clue would it give us?"

"Very little, certainly, and yet, who knows what we may find there that would throw light upon his doings?"

"Then you intend to enter?"

"Yes, certainly."

The gate opening into the grounds around the house to let was firmly secured.

They tried to force it open, but failed.

The walls were high and difficult to surmount.

Yet this was the only means by which they could hope to gain admittance to the interior.

After much difficulty, they succeeded in their object.

Though much against their will, they had to leave their horses outside while they carried on their investigations within.

They determined, however, that this should not occupy any more time than was absolutely requisite.

Passing through the deserted and long-neglected garden, they were surprised to perceive, first of all, that it had been trampled all over by heavy footsteps.

"They have been here, Jack," said Blueskin, "you may depend upon it! Look there!"

He pointed to the footprints.

"Yes, and a great many others, I should say, judging by the appearance of the ground. This seems more and more mysterious."

Following chiefly in these footprints, they arrived at length at the door leading into the house.

They began a rapid search, and the reader can tell without further description what was the nature of the discovery that awaited them there.

It was truly a fearful one, for the dead bodies had not been removed or touched in any way by the conspirators.

Indeed, when they found that their secret meeting-place was known, they abandoned it with all possible speed, and never ventured to go anywhere near it again.

"This is indeed evidence of Jonathan's handiwork," said Jack, as he looked at the dead bodies. "Wherever he goes he leaves slaughter behind him. When will his end be reached?"

"Soon, I hope, Jack—very soon. Such deeds as these are enough to make the whole country rise up against him."

Not satisfied with what they had seen, they continued their explorations until they had been all over the building.

Nothing of any note was seen, however, with the exception of that singular room that we have already described, in which the conspirators held that midnight meeting.

Then, coming into the open air again, which the two friends breathed with the greatest possible amount of pleasure and delight after the damp, stifling atmosphere in the house, Jack said:

"Beyond all doubt he has been here, and now the question is, which way did he go when he left?"

"That we must try to ascertain," said Blueskin. "To linger in this garden any longer will be quite useless. We will make our way back to our horses, and then, standing close to that door, through which Jonathan doubtless passed, we will endeavour to decide in our minds which would be the route he would most likely take."

"There is no need to climb over the wall again," said Jack; "from the inner side we can doubtless open the door."

"It is not worth while," said Blueskin—"it will be far better not to disturb the appearance of the place; we will leave it exactly as we have found it, without altering or touching anything. Come!"

Jack saw at once that this would be the best.

Trees were growing close to the wall in one place, so that it was by no means so difficult to climb over.

They lowered themselves down to the ground, remounted their horses, and then took their stand at the gate.

Then they looked all around them, and as they were on rather an elevated spot they commanded a somewhat extensive view.

Nothing, however, met their gaze save trees and fields, and for aught they could tell, Jonathan was just as likely to have gone in one direction as another.

"Chance only could guide us," said Blueskin—"there is nothing else that we can trust to. We will strike off in any direction you like, and ride on, and if, after going a reasonable distance, we hear nothing of him, we will retrace our steps and try again."

Under the circumstances, there was nothing better to be done, and so this arrangement was carried out.

At a rapid rate, they took their way across the country, and at random, but yet, nevertheless, preserving one certain direction.

But there were no habitations to be seen, and scarcely any travellers.

The latter they avoided, for fear of being recognised.

Therefore they obtained no information whatever, and towards the close of the day Blueskin pulled up as he said:

"I don't think it is worth while to go any further this way, Jack—we will try elsewhere."

"But we ought to have a rest; our horses require it as well as ourselves, and I am sick for want of food."

"If we could find some inn in this locality," said Blueskin, "we should be safe enough, beyond all doubt. We might stay there for an hour or two, and perchance learn something that will be useful."

"Then, by all means let us ride forward—that is our only hope of finding an inn, for, as you know well enough, there is nothing of the kind the way we have just come."

"No. Forward—forward! Surely in a mile or so we shall find what we require."

In this hope they rode forward, and they were not disappointed.

They came at length to a lonely inn—one that seemed just the place for safety.

"If Jonathan saw that inn," was Blueskin's remark, "he would certainly take shelter there. He could not pass such a place—he would see what a chance there was of his security."

Animated by the hope that they might, after all, learn something, they pressed forward at a more rapid rate.

They gave their horses into the charge of the ostler, and entered the inn.

So much good had resulted from taking a private room and then getting into conversation with the landlord, that they thought they could not do better than adopt the same mode of proceeding now.

Accordingly they did so, and Blueskin commenced his questions cautiously at first; but he soon found that the landlord was possessed of truly startling intelligence.

As the reader may perhaps guess, this inn was no other than the one where Wild had stopped, and where he had heard the story related respecting the haunted mill—the same public-house that he had afterwards robbed.

They were close to the mill where such terrible and exciting scenes had taken place, and at no great distance from the residence of the old miser.

All these facts, with which the reader, in following out the adventures of Jonathan Wild, has been made acquainted, were related to them, considerably exaggerated, it is true, but in the main correct.

They learned that the police officers had been summoned, and that a chase had been commenced after Jonathan Wild, with what result the landlord could not tell, for he had heard nothing of them since they took their departure.

As soon as they had heard all this, and found that they were so close upon the villain's track, Jack and Blueskin had great difficulty in restraining their impatience.

But they remained, making every inquiry they could think of, and when they were convinced they had learnt all, and not till then, they prepared to resume their journey.

In the meanwhile they had both partaken of a good meal, and their horses had been rested somewhat.

A longer halt would have been more comfortable for all; but so great was Blueskin and Jack's anxiety to renew the chase, that they knew it would be useless to attempt to sleep.

Accordingly they mounted their steeds and rode off, for they had been able to learn tolerably well the course the officers had taken.

They passed by the ruined mill, which was now no more than a heap of fragments, which would soon disappear altogether.

Upon this they could not help gazing for some moments, though they little knew all that had taken place around that spot.

For some hours they rode on continuously, only stopping at the various inns to make inquiries respecting the officers.

In every case they had information that they were on the road before them, and this urged them to increase their speed.

It is true that some considerable time had elapsed since the officers had been seen, but yet they hoped to come up with them.

No intelligence had spread abroad that either Wild or Noakes had been captured.

From this they concluded that the two villains were being chased from one place to another.

That they would be eventually captured they did not doubt.

When Jack and Blueskin should find themselves anywhere near the officers they were so anxious to overtake, they would have to act with great prudence and caution.

It was not likely that the reward offered for Blueskin had been forgotten, or that he would fail to be recognised by some of those officers; and as for Jack himself, it was most important that he should keep out of sight.

Both were thinking of all these things, but the subject was not mentioned by either.

For one thing, conversation would have been difficult; and again, they thought there was time enough in the future.

At length they learned at a wayside inn a rumour to the effect that Jonathan and Noakes had been captured by the sea-shore.

It was only a rumour, however, and a vague one, and they failed to obtain any particulars beyond the bare statement of the fact that the capture had been made.

They were inclined to doubt the truth of this good news, but there was only one way by which their doubts could be set at rest.

This was to push on with all speed for the place that had been mentioned, and this accordingly they did.

CHAPTER DCXCI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD AT LENGTH REACH THE SEA-SHORE.

As the reader must already be aware, it was no apparition that Jonathan Wild beheld that night when he peeped through the hedge.

It was Jack Sheppard himself, in flesh and blood.

Just at that time his horse, which was of much better quality than Blueskin's, had increased the distance between them to the extent of several yards.

Being plunged in deep meditation, Jack was some time before he observed this.

But at length making the discovery, he pulled up suddenly, and waited for Blueskin to regain his position at his side.

Little did Jack think that on the other side of the hedge was the man he was so anxious to make prisoner and hand over to justice.

But we have seen already what a terrible effect was produced upon Jonathan Wild by this apparition.

It gave such a shock to his whole system as he had never before experienced—in fact, his horror was so great that his senses entirely deserted him, and he fell back bereft of all motion.

The slight sound that he made falling down upon the grass was not sufficient to reach Jack Sheppard, although all around was so very silent.

Perhaps he really did hear it, slight as it was, but he would imagine it was produced by the rustling of the trees.

Could Jack only have known it, how easily he could have secured his great enemy!

He could have bound him without a struggle, and made quite sure of his being placed properly in the hands of the police officers.

But, as we know, it was not to be—Jonathan's race was not yet run.

In his own mind the villain felt that it was drawing to a close, but yet he struggled hard against the conviction, and tried his best to preserve his life and liberty.

Jack, moreover, did not expect to find Jonathan anywhere in that locality, but closer to the sea-beach.

In a moment after Jonathan had lost his consciousness, Blueskin came up.

"You are impatient, Jack," he said, "and I don't wonder at it. I am anxious myself, too; but at the same time I feel terribly fatigued."

"And so do I," said Jack, pressing his hand against his forehead. "Now that I have halted I seem overpowered by weakness."

"We must certainly rest somewhere," was Blueskin's answer, "and that before long."

"Let us endeavour to reach the coast first," said Jack. "Don't give up—surely it cannot be much further?"

"I should think not—perhaps only a few miles."

"If we have been correctly informed," said Jack, "it can't be any more than that."

"Oh! doubtless our information is correct enough, and I only hope the good news will be confirmed."

"So do I; we have the best of evidence how closely the officers have kept upon his track. Rely upon it, they will not rest until they have hunted him down."

"Forward, then—forward once more! We will ride on until we reach the next inn; we will then inquire how far it is to the coast, and if the distance is inconsiderable, we will continue on our way. On the other hand, should it be much further than we imagine, then we will rest."

This being agreed upon, they again urged onward their exhausted steeds.

The animals had indeed performed their part well; but they were even more worn out than their riders.

Nearly an hour elapsed before they arrived at the next inn.

Here they allowed the horses a little hay and water, but they did not dismount.

They were informed that the sea-coast was not more than five miles distant—it might be rather less.

Such a distance as this, after the long journey they had made, appeared the merest trifle.

Strangely enough, at this public-house they could hear nothing relative to Wild's capture, and therefore they began to feel more doubtful still.

A little while now would serve to set all their doubts at rest.

The horses, however, were so dreadfully tired that the remaining five miles were performed at a scarcely quicker rate than a walk.

At length, however, the roar of the waves, as they came rushing towards the shore, reached their ears.

It was now early morning, and by the aid of the rising sun they perceived a small collection of huts upon the beach.

Towards these, of course, they directed their horses' steps.

The place was so small as scarcely to deserve the name of village, and yet there was one house that was evidently used as a place of public entertainment.

It was a rudely-built place, standing at some distance from all the other habitations.

A dark, dilapidated, ruinous house, built for the most part of old timbers that had from time to time been washed up by the restless waves.

There was no sign showing it was a public-house; but, as a substitute, a wisp of straw had been hung out.

"That's the place," said Jack. "We shall learn all we want to know there, I'll warrant. We shall be able to rest ourselves and our horses' too."

"Yes," said Blueskin, "for let the intelligence we have heard be true or not, we cannot proceed any further without a long halt. I am thoroughly exhausted."

"So am I," said Jack. "We will stay here until our horses and ourselves are thoroughly refreshed."

The appearance of the two strangers attracted but little attention, for the inhabitants of the little huts seemed all asleep.

The door of the public-house, however, was standing open, and as soon as they halted before it a man came out.

A dark, evil, repulsive-looking man he was—one whose appearance harmonised well with the wretched building in which he dwelt.

"We shall stay here for a few hours," said Jack, "if you can accommodate us and our horses."

The man stood gazing at them for some time before he ventured to reply.

Then he said:

"Yes, gentlemen, you are welcome—quite welcome, though you will find this a very poor place to stay in."

"It will do for us," said Blueskin, as he slowly alighted.

"I am glad to hear it," said the man. "I will take the horses. Be good enough to walk indoors the while. You see, there is not much trade done, and I am obliged to be ostler and waiter and everything myself."

"I presume you are the landlord?"

"Yes; but go in. You will find the old woman indoors. She will give you what you require."

"No matter," said Jack; "we will follow you with the horses."

The man did not appear to receive this announcement with any amount of pleasure, yet he could not make any objection to such a proceeding.

Accordingly the two friends followed him, and saw their steeds properly fed and stabled.

Then they turned back to the inn, and seated themselves in a miserable, comfortless apartment, but yet the best of which the place could boast.

By this time they had managed to dispel much of the landlord's surliness.

He spoke to them much more freely than he had at first.

When they imagined he was inclined to be tolerably confidential, they began to speak about Jonathan Wild.

The man regarded them suspiciously and anxiously for a moment, and then gave them a long narrative.

He told them how a boat belonging to one of the villagers had been seized, and how Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes had put to sea in it, and how, after a lapse of some days, they had been driven back by the force of the storm close to the spot from which they had embarked.

He informed him also that the police officers, happening to reach the coast just at that moment, perceived them and made them prisoners as soon as they landed.

When they were assured that Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes had beyond all doubt been made prisoners by the police officers, Jack and Blueskin drew long breaths of relief.

It was an immense satisfaction for them to know that their once powerful enemy was now again in the grasp of justice.

The landlord entered into a circumstantial narrative of the whole affair, and what he said convinced his hearers that there could be no mistake either as regarded the facts or the identity of the prisoners.

Nothing better than fish was to be had in the shape of food, but they were hungry, and therefore they made an excellent meal.

A reaction now begun to set in.

The excitement which had kept both up for so long departed.

Fatigued as they were, they felt they could do nothing but fling themselves down somewhere and sleep.

Very many hours had indeed passed since they closed their eyes.

The landlord was called in, and he led them to a sleeping room on the ground floor of the building.

The accommodation here was more wretched than ever, but there was a rude apology for a bed, and they were so overtired that they were indisposed to find fault with anything.

The door was secured as well as the nature of the fastenings would permit, and then Blueskin said:

"I don't like the looks of this place at all, Jack—do you?"

"I do not."

"And I don't like the feel of it either. I have done nothing but shiver ever since I have been in it."

"It must be our fancy," said Jack. "And yet the landlord is about the most disagreeable-looking fellow that I have seen for many a long day."

"Hush! don't speak so loud. He may overhear us, and you may depend he would not take any such remark as that in good part."

"True. I don't like the idea, though tired as we are, of both going to sleep together. You don't know how soon danger may assail us, nor what form it may assume."

"We are safe here—don't feel afraid of that."

"It is best to be careful," said Blueskin. "Let us watch and sleep by turns. We will take short spells at first, and draw lots to decide who shall sleep first."

This was agreed to, and Blueskin had to keep watch.

"Now, Jack," he said, "sleep, and sleep soundly without fear. I will keep good guard all the while, and in an hour or so I will awake you, and you shall take my place."

Jack laid down on the bed, and so thoroughly was he overcome by exhaustion and fatigue that he closed his eyes and fell almost immediately into a sound sleep.

Blueskin sat upon the one chair there was in the room,

and looked out of the window which commanded a view of the ocean.

But, strive as he would, he could not resist the influence of sleep.

He shook off the feeling several times, but at last it proved the conqueror.

Presently he slipped from the chair on to the floor, and there remained slumbering heavily, and insensible to everything that was going on around him.

CHAPTER DCXCII.

JACK SHEPPARD HAS A SINGULAR DREAM IN THE INN ON THE SEA-SHORE.

WHEN Jack Sheppard awoke, all around him was plunged in darkness.

He started up suddenly, like one alarmed.

He glanced around, and it was a minute or two before he could recollect just where he was and what had last happened to him.

The darkness surprised and puzzled him.

He could not believe that he had slumbered for so long a time.

In a low voice, he called upon his comrade.

But for some time there was no reply.

At length, Blueskin started up.

He also was confused, and he said:

"Why, Jack, I must have tumbled off to sleep myself without being aware of it."

"I don't wonder at it," was the reply. "We seem to have slept peacefully and safely, though had I known that you were not watching I could not have closed my eyes."

"It was wrong of me," said Blueskin, "but, as it happens, no harm has come from it."

"I think not. But, Blueskin—"

"What?"

"I have had a dream."

"A dream?" was the response, given with a start.

"Yes, a fearful, terrible dream—so vivid that even now I almost feel in doubt whether it is something I have been witnessing or merely a vision!"

"It is strange," said Blueskin, in an impressive voice, "but I, too, have dreamed!"

"A fearful dream?"

"Yes, terrible!"

"Hush!—don't speak so loud! Let me hear it."

"No, let me hear yours—you spoke first."

"As you like," said Jack. "Come closer to me, and listen."

Blueskin obeyed, and then, in a low tone, scarcely above a whisper, Jack said:

"I don't know how it was—I can't possibly recollect—but in my dream I all at once found myself watching the movements of a man. He was walking slowly and wearily along the same high-road we travelled yesterday, and was going towards the sea."

"He supported his steps by a stout stick, and on his back he carried something that looked like a large square basket, covered over with some black substance."

"What this contained I don't know, but I remember thinking that it could not be very heavy, because the man who carried it walked nearly upright."

"He perceived, at length, this very inn in which we now are. As soon as he saw it, he bent his steps towards it. He arrived, and was greeted by the landlord in a similar way to what we were."

"He entered, and called for some refreshment. That was placed before him."

"Then I thought, while the man sat making this meal, that it grew very dark and rainy."

"The pedlar—for such I took him to be, by the large pack he carried—looked out of the window, and, perceiving the aspect of the weather, shook his head."

"Just then the landlord entered, and I dreamt I heard him say:

"'We shall have a very dirty night, master, I can promise you; I know what it means when the wind begins to blow in that quarter.'"

"Yes," replied the pedlar, "it will be rough weather."

"Shall you continue your journey in spite of it?"

"I don't know," was the reply. "Can you find me a bed if I want one?"

"Oh, yes—certainly!"

"Then I shall see presently. If the weather does not improve I shall stay all night."

"It will get worse instead of better," was the landlord's rejoinder, as he left the room.

"Then I saw the pedlar look anxiously and half-timidly all about him, and I saw him place his hands upon his breast in a peculiar manner, as though to satisfy himself that something he had concealed there was quite safe."

"He smiled, and put his hand inside his coat and drew out a large leather bag. He glanced around him apprehensively, but finding no one in sight, he untied the mouth of the bag and took from it one of the many gold coins that it contained."

"Then all at once I became aware that the landlord was peeping through a small window in a dark corner, watching every movement of the pedlar."

"When he saw the large bag of money, I perceived his eyes gleam ferociously, and his countenance was truly terrible to look on."

"The pedlar seemed greatly agitated, and hastened to conceal the bag again under his coat. Then he rapped upon the table with his knuckles, and in answer to the summons the landlord appeared."

"I shall stay here all night," said the pedlar—"the weather is too bad to go any further. Here—take for what I have had, and for the bed as well, as I shall want to leave early in the morning."

"Very good," said the landlord, as he gave him the change; "you can start away as early as you think proper, and if you like to go to bed now, the room is ready for you."

"Well, I will; I am very sleepy and tired—show me the way."

"The pedlar picked up his pack, and the landlord, observing the ease with which he lifted it, said:

"Your goods seem very light, master."

"They are," replied the pedlar, with a smile: "my pack is empty at present, but I hope to have it full in a day or two."

"You have come down here to make some purchases, then?" continued the landlord, with a peculiar smile.

"Yes, such is my intention."

"Ah! I understand," said the landlord, with a laugh. "You are going to buy silks, and lace, and things of that kind, and buy them free of duty," he added, with a smile. "There, don't make a fuss about it—I know how these things are managed. Tell me whose boat you expect. It won't be in to-night, that's certain."

"The pedlar hesitated, and then he answered:

"The fact is, I am expecting Derrick's boat."

"I know," said the landlord, with a nod—"he meant being here to-night, but I don't think he will. I know he has a rich cargo of silks and stuffs on board, and I suppose you are going to deal with him?"

"I shall try," said the pedlar. "If you hear anything of the boat arriving, let me know, because the sooner I am off with the goods the better."

"I will awake you," said the landlord—"don't feel afraid of that."

"The pedlar passed into this very room, where he was conducted by the landlord."

Upon reaching this point in his strange narrative, Jack trembled and shook.

He paused, and Blueskin said, in a hollow voice:

"It is very strange, Jack—very strange!"

"But the strangest has yet to come."

"I don't mean that—I don't mean that!"

"What then?"

"Why, all that you have told me is just what I have dreamt myself."

"You—you had the same dream?"

"Yes—every particular corresponds. You have told it well, Jack—you have left out nothing, except that you did not mention that the pedlar had a long, grizzly beard coming down to his breast, and that he wore a felt hat with a broad brim."

"That's proof conclusive," said Jack. "I didn't mention it, but such was the very appearance of the man."

"Is it not strange?"

"It is wonderful! But follow on: you tell the remainder of the dream, and I will see whether it corresponds with mine."

"I cannot."

"Cannot?"

"No, for just when I reached the point in my narrative where you have left off, I heard you calling upon me, and I awoke."

"Then you have been spared a knowledge of the worst—the remainder is dreadful."

"Go on, Jack, but speak low."

"I will; but I can't understand how it is that you should have been dreaming the same curious thing—it passes all belief!"

"It does; but we will speculate upon it at another time. Go on; tell me the rest—I am most impatient to hear it."

"Well, then, the landlord entered the room with the pedlar, and put down the candle; then a few more words passed, and he left the room, closing the door behind him."

"Then the same suspicious, uneasy, restless look that I had before noticed in the pedlar's eyes again appeared. He seemed to be trembling with excitement. His teeth chattered."

"With silent steps he crossed the room to the door, and secured it as well as he was able by the one bolt that you have shot into its socket."

"When he had done this he appeared to be more satisfied and content."

"He walked across to the window, and saw that that was also properly fastened."

"He next sat down in a dark corner, and produced from the breast of his coat the bag of gold that I had seen him place there."

"About this, for some reason or the other, he seemed to be exceedingly solicitous."

"He was nervous and restless, and his hands trembled excessively, as he again untied the string with which it was secured."

"Then, putting his hand in, he drew out a handful of gold pieces, which he counted over slowly one by one."

"In doing this, he was careful not to make any chinking sound."

"In this manner he proceeded until the bag was emptied."

"Then he looked satisfied, as though, upon examination, he had found the contents of the bag all right."

"Once more the gold was restored, and, when the bag was tied up, he looked around him, as if undecided where to place it for safety during the night."

"At length making up his mind, he placed it beneath the pillow; then, not troubling to undress himself, he lay down at full length on the bed, and shortly afterwards appeared to fall into a profound slumber."

"How long he might have remained thus I know not. I fancied in my dream that I watched him for a considerable period, but presently all grew confused and indistinct."

"At length, however, my vision grew clearer, but I saw before me another and a very different scene."

"It was in one of the back rooms of the inn, and the landlord was engaged in sharpening a knife upon a piece of stone."

"The expression on his face was dreadful to look at—there was murder in every lineament."

"I knew instantly that it was his intention to murder the pedlar for the sake of his gold, and I struggled about, being anxious to warn the man of his danger, but in vain. I had no control over any of my limbs, and, much against my will, I was compelled to remain a motionless spectator of all that took place."

"The operation of sharpening the knife having been completed, the landlord turned slowly round and made his way towards yonder door."

Jack pointed to the door of the room while he spoke.

"He was careful to come along on tiptoe. He made not the slightest noise, or I should have heard it, for the peculiar noise produced by sharpening the knife had been quite audible."

"Pausing, at length, on the other side of the door, he raised the latch gently and tried to open it."

"He clenched his teeth together with vexation when he discovered that the door had been secured."

"Really, however, this made little difference to him, and by what he did I came to the conclusion that he had entered the room when the door had been thus fastened on more than one occasion."

"He took a little piece of wire from his pocket, which



[BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ALARMED AT THE APPROACH OF THE LANDLORD.]

he pushed through two holes in the door near the belt.

"He worked it about for a moment or two, and then, gently and slowly, drew back the bolt.

"The door was then open, and there was no obstacle to prevent him from entering the chamber.

"Before he ventured to do so, however, he stood listening for several seconds.

"The slight noise that he had made might have partially aroused the sleeper.

"Satisfied, at length, by the regular, heavy breathing, which I could hear with perfect plainness, he entered the room on tiptoe.

"How hard I tried to make my presence known, either to frustrate his villanous intention or else to wake up the pedlar and put him on his guard!

"But I was powerless. I could see, and that was all.

No. 147.—BLUESKIN.

"Half a dozen strides brought the landlord to the side of the bed.

"He raised the glittering and newly-sharpened knife in the air, and then prepared to strike.

"Just as the weapon was descending, a kind of shiver overspread the pedlar's body, and he opened his eyes.

"They encountered the gleaming knife and the distorted countenance of the landlord.

"Before he could move, or utter the cry that rose to his lips, the knife was buried in his heart.

"There was no need for the landlord to repeat his blow.

"His aim had been well taken—death was instantaneous.

"The limbs of the murdered man quivered and trembled a little, but not much; the muscular action soon ceased, and then he lay profoundly still.

"As he was now past all help, I looked upon the remainder of the landlord's proceedings with a calmer eye.

"I was curious to know what would be his next proceeding, and how he would dispose of the body.

"I was not kept long in doubt, for, as you shall hear, I witnessed the whole of these occurrences, and then woke up, wondering greatly where I could be, and whether it was a dream or reality."

CHAPTER DCCXCIII.

IN WHICH IT TURNS OUT THAT JACK'S VISION WAS NOT ALTOGETHER A DREAM.

"It was truly an awful dream, Jack," said Blueskin, drawing a long sigh—"and, by the manner you relate it, it must also have been a vivid one!"

"Most vivid!"

"Well, go on. Make haste—let us get the story over."

"With all my heart; but I could not rest until I had told you all."

"Nor could I until I had heard it."

"Well, then, listen."

"I am all attention."

"The landlord stood watching the dead man for several moments.

"He made no attempt to draw the knife from the wound—it remained there, buried up to the hilt.

"As though the task was a repugnant one, he turned the pedlar slowly over in the bed, and then thrusting his hand beneath the pillow, drew forth the bag of gold.

"The murderer's eyes sparkled and glistened as he seized it, and when he found how much wealth it contained, judging from its weight, his delight knew no bounds.

"He looked round the chamber for some place in which to secrete it, but finding nowhere to his mind, he consigned the bag to one of his capacious pockets.

"Once again he turned towards the bed, and then I knew what it was he intended to do next.

"It was to remove the body.

"He was by no means gentle in his treatment.

"The pedlar was a man of average size, and therefore it would have been difficult to carry him.

"Seizing him by the feet, he dragged him from the bed on to the floor.

"The crash that the body made when it struck upon the boards was awful—I fancy I can hear it now."

And Jack shuddered at the recollection.

"In this manner, holding him by the feet, the landlord dragged the pedlar out of the room, along a narrow passage, and through another door, into a neglected piece of garden at the back.

"I looked to see in what direction he was going, and perceived an old, ruinous kind of well.

"The brickwork around it had half crumbled away, and the wooden framework of the windlass above was half decayed.

"I was conscious that he intended to throw the body into this pit, and my conjecture was soon after verified.

"Raising him up, he tugged him over the edge of the brickwork, and then with a sullen plunge the body vanished in the depths below.

"The landlord then drew a long breath and turned away, going in the direction of the inn.

"I am conscious that there is something I have left untold, but what it is I cannot now remember; perhaps my memory will serve me better in a little time.

"However, you see that my dream furnishes a very circumstantial account of a most barbarous murder."

"It does—it does indeed, and it is more than strange that you should be able to remember so many details."

"It is extraordinary."

"And are you sure that this is the room in which the crime was committed?"

"Yes, this is certainly the room I saw in my dream; but why do you ask the question?"

"Because if there is any real truth in it we should probably be able to find somewhere in the chamber corroborative evidence of what you have seen."

"I had not thought of that," said Jack, springing up.

"That's a good thought—we will see."

"Yes, such is my intention. Wait a moment, and I will get a light."

Blueskin quickly lighted one of those small tapers that he always carried with him, and by the aid of this they commenced their investigations.

"The bed," said Jack—"let us look at that first, for if there is any truth in what I have dreamt, surely some signs of the deed will be shown upon it."

"Certainly."

The clothes were rapidly stripped off, until the mattress was exposed to view.

The light of the taper was cast upon it, and then the two searchers started and looked curiously into each other's countenances.

Upon the mattress there was a large, dark, reddish-brown stain.

It was about two hands in breadth.

"That looks as though there was some truth in the vision," said Jack.

"It does indeed. Rely upon it, all that you have seen in your dream is but a repetition of what has taken place here at some time or other. I consider that stain the ample proof."

"So do I. It is fortunate that we have so little money, or the landlord might have been tempted to treat us in a similar way."

"Or it may be that he would shrink from encountering two," said Blueskin, "and he might guess from our manner that we should not submit easily."

"He might, that is true."

"There is one thing, however, I should like to have cleared up before we leave this place, for my curiosity is strongly excited by it."

"What is it?"

"Why, to ascertain whether there is a garden similar to the one of which you dreamt, and whether there is a well in it."

"I have no doubt about it in my own mind," said Jack, "judging by what we have already seen."

"Still, I should like to have it put beyond all possibility of doubt."

"And so should I; but hush—hark! I can hear some one approaching. Put out the light—quick! Perhaps it's the landlord who is coming."

The taper was hastily extinguished, and then Blueskin and Jack crept noiselessly towards the door.

Here they stood listening, and then the sound of footsteps came plainly on their ears.

The next moment they saw through the chinks of the ill-fitting door a faint flash of light.

The landlord was evidently carrying a candle.

Was his destination the chamber in which they stood?

They were not long kept in doubt upon this point, for the footstep paused upon the threshold, and then there came a sharp knocking upon the woodwork.

"What is it?" asked Blueskin—"what's the matter? Why do you knock?"

"I only came to inquire whether you were awake, gentlemen," said a voice which they immediately recognised as the landlord's, "and if so, to know whether you would like any refreshment."

"Yes, we don't mind if we do," answered Blueskin; "we will be with you in a few moments."

"Would you like the light?"

"No, it does not matter."

The landlord then slowly retired, and Jack said in a whisper:

"Don't talk about any refreshments here, I beg. I could not bear to eat or drink anything more beneath this roof."

"But I think that is rather foolish, Jack. We may have to go a long way before we have the chance of getting a meal again."

"No matter. You can have what you like, but I shall touch nothing."

"Will you go into the garden first?"

"I think we may venture to do that; at any rate, let us try."

So saying, they opened the door and left the chamber. They then found themselves in a dark, narrow passage.

By turning to the right they knew they would reach the front portion of the inn, where they had previously sat, but turning to the left Jack believed would take them to the garden he had seen in his dream.

No signs of the landlord could be seen, and therefore they did not hesitate to take this course.

At the extremity of the passage was a door which was secured only by a latch.

Raising it, they passed out.

Young as the night was, the moon had already risen.

It is true she was but a few degrees above the horizon, yet her beams served to illuminate all objects with tolerable distinctness.

In comparison with the darkness of the chamber in which they slept, it seemed positively daylight in the open air.

"It is all as I dreamt it," said Jack, in a hushed voice. "Look—there's the well."

"Where—where? I can't see it."

"Yonder. There seems only the crumbling brickwork remaining around it—it looks as though the windlass had quite decayed away. But step forward—a closer inspection will prove the truth of this."

They walked straight up to the edge of the well, and its appearance corresponded exactly with the description that Jack had given of it.

The brickwork was indeed in a most ruinous condition, so much so that it was positively dangerous to approach close to the brink.

At each side, however, two darkened stumps of wood could be seen protruding from the soil.

They were the remains of the frame of the windlass Jack had seen.

"Some time must have elapsed since this deed was done," said Jack, "and I think we are right in concluding that it has been done, for, so far as I can tell, these stumps have been like this for a long while."

Blueskin did not reply, but leaning forward as far as he dared, looked down.

But the darkness in the well was too profound to be pierced.

He saw, however, that near the top the walls were wet and slimy, and in many places overgrown by moss and other green creeping plants.

Jack looked down too, and raising his foot, kicked away one of the bricks.

It fell with a rushing sound.

They heard it strike twice against the sides, and then with a loud splash it reached the water at the bottom.

The depth was very great.

Just at that moment they fancied they heard a slight noise behind them.

Turning round, they saw the landlord only a few paces off.

He had evidently been advancing towards them.

An angry scowl was on his face, and his manner was exceedingly confused.

He tried hard to calm himself, however.

But his voice trembled as he spoke.

"I was looking for you, gentlemen. I did not know where you had gone."

"We were just looking about us," said Jack, coolly.

"What a deep old well that is you've got in the garden—I should think it's very dangerous to have it in such an unprotected state; why, in the dark anyone might walk into it."

"That's true, gentlemen; but then this bit of garden I consider private—no one goes into it but myself."

The words themselves were calm and collected enough, but they were spoken in an agitated, breathless manner.

"It will be a fine night," said Blueskin, glancing up at the sky; "we will not stay much longer, but resume our journey to-night."

"Very good, gentlemen; if you will follow me I will take you to the front room. I have prepared as good a repast as I am able, but you must not expect many luxuries in this out-of-the-way place."

"Lead on, then," said Jack—"we will follow."

The landlord turned slowly, and as it seemed unwillingly, and led the way back to the inn.

Jack took hold of Blueskin by the arm, and then whispered in his ear:

"We turned round just in time. I am sure from the villain's manner that he was creeping up behind us stealthily, and that it was his intention to have pushed us down the well."

"And he would have done it, too," said Blueskin, "if he had managed to reach us unperceived. When we were

in that position the slightest touch would have thrown us off our balance, and then nothing could have saved us—we must have perished."

Both shuddered, for upon reflection they saw what a narrow escape they had had from a frightful death.

CHAPTER DCXCIV.

THE VILLANOUS INTENTIONS OF THE LANDLORD ARE MADE FULLY APPARENT BY BLUESKIN'S STRATAGEM.

THAT Jack and Blueskin were perfectly correct in their surmises respecting the intentions of the landlord there could be not the least doubt.

By accident he discovered they had left the room in which they had slept, and he had followed them into the garden.

When he saw them standing near the well, a thousand terrors sprang up in his breast—so true is it that a guilty conscience is its own accuser.

Something seemed to come across his mind and tell him that his secret crime had been discovered, or else why should they be standing on the margin of the well endeavouring to look down it?

Simultaneously with this thought came the resolution of destroying them, and, therefore, as noiselessly as possible he stepped across the soft, rank mould in the garden.

Yet he could not avoid making a slight sound, and that sound reached the ears of Jack and Blueskin just in time.

The landlord did not turn back, but yet he knew that they were whispering to each other, and he knew also that they were speaking of his late intent.

He compressed his lips and clenched his hands tightly, while the frown upon his brow told that he had come to some stern and terrible resolution.

Upon reaching the room where the two friends had first sat down, he said:

"There is your supper, or dinner, or whatever you choose to call it, gentlemen. It looks very plain and very rough, I daresay, but yet it is wholesome. However, I have some capital ale that you can wash it down with, and that will perhaps make up for the shortcomings of the rest."

"Very good," said Jack, "and in the meanwhile you can be getting our horses ready for the road, for as soon as ever we have despatched this meal we will be off."

The landlord then left the room.

Blueskin sat down at the table, but looked doubtfully at the viands before him.

Certainly they were by no means tempting.

Then he remembered Jack's words.

"Are you really in earnest about not having anything to eat?" he asked.

"Yes, quite in earnest. I could not bear to touch anything either in the shape of food or drink."

"But why not?"

"The landlord I am convinced wishes us no good; he must suspect that we have a knowledge of his crime—if so, rely upon it he will try to make that knowledge valueless."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, he may place something of a poisonous character either in the food or in the drink, and so make himself sure of us."

"I will taste the ale, at any rate," said Blueskin, "and see whether your suspicions are just or not."

"Pray do no more than sip it!"

"I will not, you may depend."

Blueskin placed the jug of ale to his lips, and took a small quantity into his mouth to taste it.

"It has a strange taste!" he exclaimed. "I am sure it is not the same we had before. Your suspicions, Jack, are just. At first he probably had no intention upon our lives, but now, finding we have guessed his secret, he has resolved to put an end to us."

"That's it; the ale may only be drugged, and he would calculate on making us an easy prey after we had drunk a little of it. You must remember it is not at all strange that he should have the means at hand of drugging the liquor, for you know publicans have all sorts of stupefying things at hand."

"Yes—yes," said Blueskin; "and yet—"

"Yet what?"

"I should like to ascertain whether our suspicions really are well founded."

"I doubt whether it is worth while. Had we not better ride off? We shall have much difficulty in overtaking Jonathan and his party."

"I don't know why we should hurry," said Blueskin. "If they are captured they are safe, rely upon it. All we have to do is to journey on towards London; we shall soon learn whether anything unusual has taken place."

"Very true; and certainly after all this trouble it is not at all probable that the officers would allow Jonathan to slip through their fingers."

"Well, but to go back to what I was saying."

"About putting the landlord to the test?"

"Yes, that's it. Supposing we pour this ale away, and then put our arms upon the table and rest our heads upon them as if asleep? If he comes in and is surprised at our position he will awake us; if not, we shall know his intent, and shall have time to defend ourselves from him."

"So we shall. Let it be done."

The ale accordingly was poured away upon the floor, and as there was plenty of sawdust lying about it was quickly absorbed.

Just then, a miserable, half-starved-looking dog came sneaking into the room.

As soon as he saw him, Jack said:

"Try him with some of the food, Blueskin; we shall see whether he eats it, and if he does, what effect it has upon him."

"Very good," said Blueskin—"it will seem as though we have both had something to eat and drink."

"It will."

Some portions of the food were cut off and given to the dog, who snapped them up eagerly.

The creature seemed half famished, and he swallowed the morsels instantly.

"Come and sit by my side," said Blueskin; "then when we hear the landlord approaching, we can easily put our heads down and pretend to sleep."

"We had better do it at once," said Jack. "Look in yonder corner—there's the window I saw in my dream, through which the landlord watched the movements of the pedlar. I don't think he is there now, yet he might watch us."

"It is best to be cautious," said Blueskin.

Accordingly the two friends rubbed their eyes and stretched their arms, as though struggling against the influence of slumber.

At length they slowly allowed their heads to fall upon their arms, which rested on the table.

In this position they could converse easily enough.

A long time passed in silence, and they began to grow tired of their experiment.

Presently, however, the whole of their attention was absorbed by hearing some one approach.

Then the door was pushed open, and the landlord said:

"I have seen to your horses, gentlemen, and they—"

He paused suddenly.

"It's all right!" he added, in a whisper. "How soon it has taken effect! But they are safe now—quite safe!"

Blueskin gave a loud snore.

From what the landlord had said, it was clear the suspicions against him were well founded.

He stood for several moments quite motionless.

He was reflecting.

His lips moved, but no audible sound escaped them.

After awhile, however, he came to a decision, and he glided quickly from the room.

"What shall we do next?" asked Jack, in a whisper, as soon as he departed.

"Hush!" said Blueskin. "Keep an eye on all his movements, if you possibly can, and be on your guard against an attack."

"I will. Hush!—he's coming again."

The landlord again approached.

But before he ventured to enter the room, he projected his head a little way into it.

He saw that his two guests had not changed their positions.

Then he stepped noiselessly across the threshold.

In his hand he held a long-bladed knife—the same weapon that Jack had seen in his dream.

He was feeling the point of it, as if to be sure of its sharpness.

Satisfied apparently, he approached the table with long strides, halting for a second between each one.

"I must be quick," he muttered, audibly. "Yes, that will do it."

One more step brought him to the side of the table opposite to that at which Blueskin and Jack sat.

As their heads rested upon their arms in the manner we have described, the back part of their necks was displayed to view.

This was where the landlord fully intended to inflict two hasty stabs, and in that vital portion of the body they must inevitably have proved fatal.

Had Jack and Blueskin really been overpowered by the drug, as the landlord imagined they were, he would certainly have accomplished his purpose.

They waited until he was in the attitude to strike, and then started suddenly to their feet.

He uttered a howl of rage and fear.

Jack and Blueskin drew their swords, and the latter cried:

"Villain! Your purpose was suspected, and we have proved ourselves in the right! But you shall suffer dearly for your crimes! The old well shall be thoroughly searched!"

The landlord uttered another yell upon hearing these words, and then all reason and prudence appeared to forsake him.

Brandishing his formidable knife, he rushed upon the two friends.

But they were ready to receive him, and held out their swords in such a manner that he could not reach to make use of his knife.

Finding himself thus baffled, he howled and foamed with rage.

"You shall die!" he shrieked, passionately. "I will have your blood—your blood! You shall die!"

Again he uttered a yell, and this one purely of fright.

The dog sprang suddenly from the crouching position it had taken before the fire, and fixed its teeth in the landlord's leg.

The animal was mad.

The food it had eaten was poisoned or drugged as well as the ale, and now the brute was under the influence of it.

In vain the landlord tried to shake him off—the animal only closed its jaws more convulsively together.

Then, stooping down, he stabbed it fiercely with his knife—stabbed it until life was extinct, and then the dog's hold relaxed, and he freed himself.

But it would almost seem as though the poison he had so ruthlessly prepared for others took a speedy effect upon himself.

From that moment his actions were certainly those of a lunatic.

Regardless of their swords, he precipitated himself upon Jack and Blueskin, fighting wildly with his knife.

Under these circumstances, it was hard indeed to defend themselves from a chance wound.

But they managed to do so, though in self-defence they struck him several times.

"Drive him forth!" said Jack—"drive him forth! We will get into the open air! The sooner we ride away the better."

The landlord laughed hideously.

Then he flung his heavy knife with full force at his antagonists.

It missed Jack only by a hair's-breadth.

Then, after striking against the wall, it fell clattering to the floor.

Screaming with laughter again, the landlord rushed into the passage.

Then, turning round, fled hastily in the darkness.

"Let us follow him!" said Blueskin. "He's mad! Let us see that he does no mischief to anyone but himself."

CHAPTER CXCIV.

IN WHICH THE LANDLORD IS OVERTAKEN BY A JUST BUT TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION.

UTTERING shriek upon shriek, the landlord pushed open the door at the extremity of the passage, and ran into the garden.

Jack and Blueskin were much surprised that he should have taken this route, leading as it did to the spot where he had disposed of the evidence of his crime.

But that the landlord had no control over his movements and no idea where he was going is quite certain.

"What do you intend to do?" asked Jack. "How far will you follow him?"

"That depends; but it would be wrong for us to allow a lunatic—for such he certainly is—to injure other people whom he might happen to come across."

"It would—it would."

"But look at him now!" said Blueskin. "What ails him?"

The movements of the landlord now became singular in the extreme.

For a time, they puzzled both the witnesses of them.

At last, however, they were forced to come to the conclusion—extraordinary as it was—that the landlord was to all appearances struggling with some one.

He tried hard to get away, and yet appeared to be dragged still further and further in a direction he did not wish to take.

This was indeed a most singular spectacle, and Jack and Blueskin remained immovable, gazing upon it.

In a harsh, shrieking, terrified tone of voice, the landlord spoke.

"Loose me—loose me!" he yelled. "Let me go! Why do you cling so tightly? Loose me, I say! I will not be dragged to the well! That's where you are trying to drag me! But I will not go! Release me, I say—let go your hold!"

These words were uttered sometimes with a pause of several seconds between them, and all the time the landlord continued to writhe about in the garden with his invisible and imaginary foe.

Yet, strange to state, in spite of all his frantic efforts, he continually got nearer and nearer to the brink of the old well.

He renewed his cries and shrieks, and entreaties to be let off.

"Not the well—not the well! Anywhere but there, and I will follow you! It is so deep—so very deep! You have threatened me many a time, and now I am in your grasp! But let me go—let me go! Ah! you will not?—you refuse to listen to my words? Then I will compel you!"

The struggles then became much more violent than before.

But the result was just the same.

Slowly but surely the landlord was making his way nearer to the brink of the well.

"He will go over," said Jack, breaking the silence by an effort—"I am sure he will go over if we do not prevent him!"

"I shall not make the attempt," said Blueskin. "It is pretty clear that he imagines that the pedlar he has murdered has seized him in his grasp. It is a phantom he is struggling with, though to him it appears like reality. If we were to approach, it would probably only have the effect of hastening his fate."

"Then we can do nothing but watch."

"Nothing; and it will be well for some such fate to overtake him. It would be a retribution that his crime well merits."

With even more interest and curiosity than before, they continued to watch the strange scene that was taking place before them.

Nearer and nearer to the brink of the fatal abyss the landlord drew, although he evidently fancied that he was trying his utmost to go in some other direction.

And now, when he got very close to the brink of the well, his shrieks became terrible to listen to.

In the most earnest tones he implored to be released.

Then, by an effort, he would appear to get one arm at liberty, and with this he would strike fierce and random blows.

At length he stood close against the brickwork of the well, and then the manner in which he swayed backwards and forwards was singular indeed to witness.

"There's murder in your eyes!" he cried. "I can see it. I know your thoughts—you mean to drag me down to keep company with you at the bottom of the well! But I will not give up my life without a struggle!"

Just at this moment he struck the crumbling wall heavily with his feet.

It only wanted such a blow as that to send the whole mass down into the depths of the well.

With a last loud, despairing shriek, the landlord followed it.

When they saw him disappear, Jack and Blueskin ran forward, but did not venture to go too close to the verge.

Then they listened.

But all was as still as the grave.

The landlord's end was come.

"This is terrible," said Jack, as he drew a long breath of relief—"terrible in the extreme!"

"Yes," replied his companion. "It is a sight I should not care to witness again, yet I cannot help feeling a great degree of satisfaction at finding things turn out as they have done."

"Yes, that's right enough; but now the end has come, let us depart. There can be no reason to linger here now, and the sooner we depart, the more comfortable shall I feel."

"Yes, so shall I. It's an awful den! Let us try and find our horses."

"I trust they will be safe."

"Oh, yes—don't doubt that! It would not be to the landlord's interest to injure them."

"Come, then!"

Willingly enough, both left the weed-grown garden.

A little door in the wall led them into another yard, and on the other side of this they perceived a low, badly-built shed that doubtless answered the purpose of a stable.

Towards this they bent their steps, and found they were correct in their conjectures.

The horses were there, apparently safe and sound.

With all convenient speed they saddled and bridled them.

Then they led them out and mounted.

"Now for London!" said Blueskin. "We cannot do better than push on for the metropolis with all speed. The officers, having Jonathan in their possession, would be sure to take the nearest way to the Old Bailey."

"Yes, beyond a doubt they would do so."

"Yet as we go along we will inquire."

"Yes, that follows as a matter of course."

The horses had not been badly cared for, and the long rest they had had sufficed to recover them from their fatigue.

Our friends found this by the manner in which they started out.

"There is no occasion for any immediate speed, Jack," said Blueskin, "and so we will not tire our horses out by pushing on at their utmost. Depend upon it, by this time Jonathan Wild is safe in Newgate, and we shall reach London in time to witness his execution."

"It seems like it—it does indeed!" said Jack. "I cannot conceive that the officers, when once they seized him, would ever allow him to escape again."

"I think it is a groundless fear."

"And so do I; and yet, in spite of all, I can't help feeling it. It may be foolish, but it is nevertheless a fact."

"I must confess to a similar feeling myself, for I know well what courage and energy Jonathan possesses. He has made his escape before, recollect, and under very extraordinary circumstances."

"He is, I admit, no common man, but yet—"

"Yet you would like to know that he was safe in custody?"

"I should; and therefore I feel anxious that we should push forward without much delay."

"It will be a saving of time," said Blueskin, "if we take our horses gently. We have not the means to obtain fresh ones should these become exhausted, and therefore it is to our interest to husband their strength as much as we can."

In this Jack could not help agreeing, but for all that he contrived to be continually a yard or so in advance of his companion.

They took the high-road towards London, and, emboldened by the safety with which they had performed the other part of their journey, they scarcely gave a thought to their own peril.

Without the occurrence of any accident, they arrived at that inn where, as we know, the officers, when they had Wild and Noakes prisoners, made a halt.

At this place they obtained confirmation of the intelligence they had previously received.

The account given by the landlord placed the matter beyond doubt.

Jonathan and Mr. Noakes, both well secured and watched by the officers, had certainly been there, and, after partaking of some necessary refreshment, they had continued their journey towards the metropolis.

Strangely enough, since they had left his house the landlord had heard nothing whatever of their proceedings.

In these days it may seem strange that such was the case; but then the difficulty of communicating between one place and another was very great indeed, and as the landlord lived in a very thinly-populated locality, he had heard nothing of Jonathan's daring escape.

It was only a brief stay that they made at this inn, and then they resumed their journey.

They were now in much better spirits than before, and felt a much greater degree of confidence in the security of their arch enemy.

The landlord had minutely described to them how both were bound, and how jealously they were watched by the police officers.

It was also described how they were placed on the horses, and strapped to two police officers.

Escape under these circumstances appeared absolutely impossible.

"It will be soon over," said Blueskin; "and then, when I have seen his end, I shall be content. When once he is in Newgate there will be no time lost. His trial has already taken place, and sentence been passed upon him. They will make short work of it, for, knowing his desperate character, they will be as anxious to see him swinging at Tyburn as we are."

"Yes; and surely I should think that when he dies there will not be found one to pity him in the least or to regret his fate."

"No one—certainly no one."

"But look," said Jack, pointing along the road. "What do you imagine is the meaning of that?"

Blueskin did not immediately reply, but looked in the direction to which his friend pointed.

Then, somewhat to his surprise, he saw sitting down by the side of the hedgerow, and with his body partly supported against the embankment upon which the hedge was planted, an old man, whose body was thin and wrinkled to a degree.

His face could not be seen, for it was completely hidden in his hands.

His hair was long and white, and fluttered strangely in the gentle breeze.

What was stranger still, was the fact that standing near him was a well-made, powerful-looking horse.

Apparently, there was no one in charge of the animal—certainly no one held the reins.

But it stood in a strange, dejected attitude, with its head bow down towards the ground, and outstretched towards the form of the old man, which it appeared to be regarding with great intuentness.

CHAPTER DCXCVI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ENCOUNTER ANOTHER VICTIM OF JONATHAN WILD'S CRUELTY AND TREACHERY. ALMOST UNCONSCIOUSLY, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard slackened the speed of their horses, and as they advanced at this diminished rate they continued to observe this peculiar spectacle.

In the attitude and manner of the horse there was something almost human.

It seemed to be looking into the old man's face with an air of melancholy solicitude, as though anxious to learn what ailed him, and, if possible, to render some assistance.

To all appearance, however, the old man himself was insensible to all that was going on around him.

He neither moved nor spoke.

"It is very singular," said Jack, as they drew nearer.

"Very singular," was his companion's reply; "but I suppose it is no business of ours."

"None whatever."

"Then shall we ride on without seeking to know more?"

"I think so. It will not do for us to mix ourselves up in any events that we may see occurring around us, because, if we do, we may indefinitely prolong our journey."

"You are right enough there, and yet it seems to me that the poor old man is in a very bad way indeed."

"I think we ought to ascertain whether it is in our power to render him any assistance."

"Well, as you will; it will be no more than a simple act of kindness—such a one as you might be grateful for yourself at some time or other."

Upon hearing them approach, the horse raised his head, and regarded them attentively.

Then, uttering a low, wailing sound, and pawing the ground with one of its fore feet, it renewed its gaze upon the form of its aged master.

Upon reaching the spot, Jack Sheppard alighted.

He stepped quickly up to the old man, and as he did so, he perceived that his dress was composed of good materials, and that it had a half military appearance about it.

"Sir," said Jack, "look up! Are you in need of assistance? If you are, speak, and all that I can do for you I will."

Slowly the hands were removed, and then a pallid, careworn, sorrow-stricken countenance was revealed.

He made a slight sign with his hands, as though he desired something to drink.

Judging by appearances, Jack concluded that he must be in a kind of faint.

At the last inn he had procured a bottle of spirits that he carried in his pocket.

This he now produced, and poured a small quantity of the liquid into the old man's mouth.

It was swallowed eagerly and greedily.

Its revivifying effects were soon made manifest, and, in a tremulous, broken voice, the old man uttered his thanks for the service that had been performed.

"You are quite welcome," said Jack; "take a little more—it will refresh you."

The old man complied with this request.

"I am better now," he said—"much better."

"Can we be of any further service to you, sir?—if so, don't be afraid to speak."

"No, no—I will not trespass upon you any further. The fact is, I have travelled far to-day—too far, indeed, for one so old and weak as I am. A little while ago, feeling quite overcome and prostrate, I slipped off my horse and sat down here. I fancy I must have been in a swoon."

"It is very likely. Shall I assist you to mount?"

"If you would not mind, young man, I should be very thankful. You may think it strange to find one like myself travelling alone, but the fact is, I am all alone in the world, and I am making a journey to London."

"To London?"

"Yes. You are surprised, doubtless, to find one of my age contemplating such a thing, but I have strong feelings to carry me there—they are hatred and revenge!"

Jack was still more astonished when he observed the amount of energy with which these words were pronounced.

The old man's eyes flashed, and, under the influence of passion, he drew himself up to his full height.

"Yes," he said—"I have heard that one who has worked much woe, and wretchedness, and misery to me and mine is about to meet with that fate that he so well deserves, and I am hastening to London in the hope of witnessing the last act of justice."

These words astonished Jack and Blueskin more and more.

The former said:

"Of whom do you speak in these terms? Who is it that has done you this injury?"

"Can you not guess?"

"I might, perhaps, if I tried, but yet it would be more satisfactory for you to speak."

"Well, then, this man who has wrought so much misery to so many people—I am not the only one—I do not stand

alone by myself, I am one of a large crowd—the man I seek is Jonathan Wild!"

"I expected as much," said Jack—"the words you have spoken can apply to no one else but that monstrous villain."

"Monstrous indeed, good sir, he is."

"Yes, I do not scruple to confess that in myself and my companion you see two more of Jonathan Wild's victims; he has been the bane and scourge of my life, and he brought my father to the scaffold."

"Then it seems to me," exclaimed the old man, "that we are animated by one common feeling. You two are journeying to London, are you not?"

"We are. Like yourself, we have heard that Jonathan Wild has been made prisoner by the police, and therefore we are journeying to the metropolis in the hope of being present at his execution."

"It is that which I am going to see—it is the hope of beholding that that keeps me alive, and enables me to retain what little amount of strength I do possess. So that it will serve and carry me to Tyburn, I care not. When I know that he has quitted this world, I shall be glad to leave it too!"

"You speak," said Jack, "like one who has indeed suffered deeply at his hands."

"I have—I have! If you would be content to journey onward at the same gentle pace that we are now going at, I could relate to you such particulars of my life as would fairly chill your blood with horror."

Jack, upon hearing this, glanced at Blueskin, in order to ascertain what were his feelings in the matter.

He understood the glance that was given him in return.

"In all that pertains to Jonathan Wild," he answered, "we are most deeply interested; and therefore, if it will not fatigue you too much, it will afford us great delight to hear whatever particulars you may have to give us."

"Then I will speak. It is long—very long since I had a confidant—very long since I had an ear into which I could pour the account of my many sorrows; it will therefore be a great relief to my mind—it will take a great weight off my heart—if I can speak freely."

"Do so—do so. Be under no fear."

"I would confess to you some portion of my own life previous to my connection with Jonathan Wild; before doing so, however, I must tell you that what I shall say will involve the confession of my participation in a guilty act—an act, the consequences of which I have hitherto escaped, and now I think I am too old to be punished in the ordinary way. Do not imagine, however, that I have escaped without punishment. What I have endured has been truly fearful! I have wished over and over again that the law had put an end to my life years and years ago, for I have lived for nothing but wretchedness and woe!"

There was a tone of great agony and contrition in the old man's voice as he spoke these words.

There was also a very great degree of impressiveness in his manner, so that Jack and Blueskin felt constrained to sit and listen silently to all he said.

"Before I begin, then," said the old man, "will you promise to keep secret what I shall reveal to you, at least until after my death?—when that happens you can proclaim my story far and wide, and I trust it may serve as a warning to others who may chance to find themselves in similar circumstances to mine."

"We willingly give that undertaking," said Jack. "You may rely upon our secrecy—we would not betray you to the officers of justice for the world!"

"With that assurance, then, I am content," said the old man, "and if you will listen, I will tell you all, and as briefly as I possibly can; but it is the history of a whole lifetime that you are about to hear—a lifetime filled with such vicissitudes as happily fall to the lot of very few."

Both were silent, and after a brief pause, during which he appeared to be collecting his thoughts, or considering what precise words he should use to commence his narration with, the old man spoke.

They were proceeding only at a walk, so that the motion of his steed gave him little inconvenience, and scarcely interfered with his voice.

The brandy he had drunk and the excitement which the reminiscences of the past had produced had made a

great alteration in him, though it is probable that when the excitement had passed away his strength would depart also, leaving him more prostrated than before.

"As you may perhaps have guessed by my pronunciation of some words," he began, "and by my general accent, I am not a native of this land, but of France."

"I speak the language tolerably well, because I have lived here during the latter half my life."

"When a youth, however, I lived in a small village in France, along with my parents."

"At that time my native country was at war with Germany. The campaign had been a long and disastrous one, and more soldiers were required."

"At the intelligence of the fresh conscription my parents were greatly troubled—more troubled than I was myself, for I confess I had always a slight inclination for a military life."

"They, however, could not bear to part with me, for I was their only child. They wished that I should follow in their humble footsteps and live in the village, as they and their forefathers before them."

"Would to Heaven that that wish had been fulfilled! But it was not to be—it was not to be, and I was made the most miserable of all human beings."

CHAPTER DCCXCVII.

IN WHICH THE SINGULAR OLD MAN COMMENCES THE STORY OF HIS LIFE.

THE old man's voice quivered, as though these recollections of the past were very painful and unpleasant to him.

But he conquered his emotion quickly, and resumed.

"Such wishes as these are quite idle and useless, and so I will indulge in no more of them, but bring my story as quickly to a close as I am able, though mine has been a long and most eventful life."

"The day of the conscription arrived, and it fell to my lot to be a soldier."

"I will pass over the grief of my parents without further mention, though I must admit it produced a deep effect upon me. That feeling, however, quickly wore away after I had bid them adieu."

"We were first taken to Paris, and there drilled and instructed."

"This occupied a considerably long time."

"At last, however, a certain number had made sufficient progress to be ordered off to the seat of war, and I was one among them."

"It wanted about ten days to the time appointed for our leaving Paris, that one night, as I walked through a dark and lonely street, I heard the clashing of swords."

"The sound warmed my blood and quickened my pulses."

"I rushed forward to ascertain the cause."

"I then saw one man in a long cloak, defending himself with a sword against the attack of three ruffians, whose intention evidently was either to rob or to murder him."

"Uttering a shout, I rushed forward, and joined in the fray."

"At the first stroke I disabled one of the gentleman's assailants, and engaged myself with another."

"The combat lasted several minutes, and at the end of that time I was left master of the field."

"The three villains decamped, but they left the gentleman I had protected stretched senseless on the ground."

"I hastened to kneel down beside him, and raised his head."

"In doing so, I saw that he showed signs of returning animation."

"He quickly recovered himself, and, remembering all that had taken place, he said:

"Thanks, stranger, for having saved my life! I have had one hard blow, but I shall be little the worse for it. Can you assist me to rise?"

"Of course I did so."

"Then I inquired his address, in order that I might see him safely home."

"He gave it to me, and expressed himself very warmly for my kind attention."

"What was my surprise and joy to discover that the gentleman to whom I had rendered this important service

was no other than one of the captains of the regiment into which I had been drafted.

"He was a generous, high-souled, noble-minded young man, for his age did not exceed mine by more than two years, and he set himself to work to make some recompense to me.

"Finding out that I was in his own regiment, he used his influence and interest, which were very great, and obtained for me the rank of cornet.

"We were now enabled to rank on equal terms with each other, and over and over again we vowed eternal friendship with each other.

"So great was the pleasure that we mutually felt when in each other's society that we were rarely apart.

"Monday was the day appointed for us to leave, and on the preceding Saturday my new friend, whose name was Dupin, said to me:

"I am going to-night to a party or ball at the house of one of my intimate friends; I have been requested to bring with me any friend I liked to invite. Will you come?"

"At first I hesitated, for, having led so long such a retired life, I was embarrassed and confused upon finding myself in strange company.

"But the captain pressed me to give my consent, and at last I did so.

"We went, and the scene was to me as delightful and enchanting as it was new.

"One object alone attracted and received my attention; all things else, even my new friend who had behaved so generously, to me was forgotten.

"This one object was a young girl of seventeen or eighteen years of age.

"In my native village I had been accustomed to see only the peasants' daughters, and in Paris I had never before had an opportunity of mixing in society.

"You may judge, then, the rapture that I felt upon beholding this lovely being.

"For some time I could only remain gazing upon her, watching her every movement, and dwelling on the delicate features of her face.

"She was, beyond doubt, the fairest and loveliest of all the assembly, and was as superior to them as she was to the peasant girls of whom I have spoken.

"Suddenly my friend came up and touched me on the arm.

"I must introduce you to some one," he said. "Come this way."

"He smiled while he spoke, and I, with a beating heart, followed him.

"To my mingled confusion and delight, he led me up to the young girl upon whom I had been gazing with so much admiration.

"He murmured some words of introduction, but then my senses were in such a whirl that I could only guess and not comprehend their purport.

"I recovered sufficiently to ask the favour of her hand for the next dance, and the request was granted with a smile—as I thought, a pleased one.

"Now that I was brought into so much closer contact with this fair being, and could hear her voice, my admiration increased a thousandfold.

"The charming gracefulness and ease of her manner enabled me to throw off all awkward embarrassment, and in a short time we were chatting and laughing with each other as gaily as though we had been friends of long standing.

"During the night I danced with her many times, and I was irresistibly led by her manner to come to the conclusion that she found my society agreeable and pleasant to her.

"I went back to my humble lodging with my brain in a perfect fever.

"I could not see my friend—I could not speak to him. I felt that I must be alone—that I must dwell upon the fair image of the beauteous girl.

"A love, deep, strong, ardent, had sprung up in my breast, and had already taken root there.

"I made no attempt to banish the thoughts that thronged into my mind—in fact, I encouraged them, and dwelt upon them with secret rapture.

"On the following evening, which was Sunday, I again saw my friend.

"He smiled frankly and good-humouredly as he shook

hands with me, and then inquired how I had enjoyed myself on the preceding night.

"You may guess my answer.

"Then he said:

"By-the-way, what do you think of that girl I introduced you to—the one you danced with so frequently?"

"I broke forth in a torrent of rapture.

"I poured out before my friend all those secret thoughts in which I had indulged the night before.

"But as I proceeded I found that his countenance grew graver and graver, and at last it assumed such an expression that I suddenly stopped.

"You are enthusiastic," he said, endeavouring to smile.

"Who could fail to be? But, my friend, who is she? Let me know her name, for when you introduced me I was so embarrassed that I could not hear it?"

"Her name," replied the captain, 'is Louise. She is the only daughter of the lady at whose house the party was given; she is also my affianced bride. We are to be wedded in the morning, previous to our departure for the seat of war.'

"I felt as though I had been suddenly struck by a thunderbolt.

"My heart stood still, and the blood ceased to circulate in my veins.

"A kind of film overspread my eyes, and for a few seconds I could see nothing.

"By a desperate effort I partially recovered my composure.

"I stammered out a few words of surprise, and then, seizing my hat, abruptly quitted the apartment.

"If you have ever loved you can guess what were my feelings at this time.

"I was like one bereft of all sense and judgment.

"My grief overwhelmed me, and a thousand vain projects flitted before my mind.

"About to be married!

"How strange that she did not mention it, or drop some hint to the effect during our conversation.

"Perhaps she imagined as I was his friend that I knew all already.

"What was most surprising, however, was the manner in which she had behaved to me.

"Could I have been led into an error?"

"No, certainly not, for, setting all vanity aside, I felt that she had looked upon me most favourably indeed.

"In her countenance I could trace the reflection of my own feelings, and then, mingled with these thoughts, came the remembrance of the friend to whom I owed so much.

"My course was clear before me, however.

"I must endeavour as best I could to forget all about Louise, and to remember my friend.

"Whether it would be possible for me to banish her image from my mind I knew not; but I could not be so base—so ungrateful—as to rob my friend of the object of his affections; that would be to place enmity between us at once, and then what should I suffer?"

"One by one, the hours passed by.

"Morning came, and as the time approached for the ceremony to take place I became more and more feverish and frantic.

"I wandered about like some restless, unquiet spirit, and the tortures I then endured no tongue ever could describe.

"At last the fatal hour was over.

"I knew then, that Louise was already wedded—she was my friend's wife, and lost to me for ever.

"The time for our departure was now approaching, and I hastened towards the appointed spot.

"On my way I met my friend.

"He greeted me warmly and affectionately as before, taking no notice of what had passed between us.

"Louise is mine," he said. "I am happy. We were wedded this morning. I searched everywhere for you—I intended that you should be present."

"I endeavoured to thank him, but failed to articulate my words distinctly.

"I have just bidden her farewell," he resumed, 'for she will not accompany me to the seat of war—at least, I expect not at present, for she is too delicate to lead such a rough life as we shall be obliged to lead. The war, however, will, doubtless, soon be over, and then I



[JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON ON THE WATCH.]

shall return, full of impatience and joy. But you, my friend,' he added—'Louise has asked about you, and said she wished to bid you farewell; there is yet time if you will be speedy. Go, you will find her at her own home. Make haste back, for there is no time to lose!' With these words, he turned round hastily and left me.

CHAPTER DCXCVIII.

THE OLD MAN CONTINUES TO RELATE THE VICISSITUDES OF HIS CAREER.

"For several moments I stood quite still, gazing in the direction in which he had gone.

"I knew that my best and wisest course was to follow him—to make no attempt to see Louise again.

"All would be happier if I adopted such a course.

No. 148.—BLUESKIN.

"But the longer I stood deliberating the less inclined I felt to practice this self-denial.

"I remembered that I was going for an indefinite period on a dangerous service.

"It might be that I should receive a fatal bullet in the first engagement—perhaps I should never again have the opportunity of seeing Louise in life.

"Above all, she desired to bid me farewell, and, at length, coming suddenly to a resolution, I darted off in the direction of her abode.

"I found her seated near the window, in a pensive attitude.

"The murmur of some sad song was on her lips.

"The embarrassment was equal on both sides when we endeavoured to speak to each other.

"I have come," I said, at length, with a great effort, 'to bid you farewell.'

"But I must not—dare not linger over this interview.

The recollections it recalls are too painful. Let it suffice to say that I was much longer away than I ought to have been, and, moreover, I obtained from her an admission that the passion I felt for her was returned.

"I folded her once in my arms, and pressed my lips to hers, then, overcome with remorse for what I had done, I tore myself away, and ran with full speed to rejoin my regiment, leaving Louise in a half-insensible condition.

"The confession of affection that I had received from her only made my woe and wretchedness the greater.

"How guilty, too, I felt! I dared no longer look my friend in the face, for fear he should read in my countenance the nature of my thoughts.

"But I could tell that in the fulness of his generous nature he trusted to me—he had every confidence in the sincerity of my friendship.

"This was an additional pang to me, for I knew how greatly I had abused it.

"The bustle consequent upon our setting forth was grateful to me, for, for a time, it drowned my thoughts.

"Upon the march to the seat of war I shall not linger—it was not marked by any particular event.

"I can only say that the captain was as kind and friendly in his behaviour as ever.

"He still seemed to feel the same delight in my companionship.

"I observed that he heard frequently from Louise.

"Oh, how I envied him those letters, and wished that I might be the recipient of them instead of him!

"And on these occasions he would dwell with great delight upon her beauty, her graces, and accomplishments.

"In him I beheld the ardent lover, and every word of adoration that he spoke was like a dagger plunged into my heart.

"At length came the day for our first engagement.

"The enemy was drawn up in a hostile attitude, ready to attack us, and in numbers far superior to our own.

"However, all our men were actuated by one feeling.

"They believed that victory would yet attend upon them, and that this impending struggle, though necessarily severe, would be the last.

"Dupont had already seen active service, and therefore he did not experience the same strange sensations as I did.

"On the preceding night we sat together talking, and before we separated we renewed those vows of friendship that we had made.

"Will it be believed that I was so base—so hypocritical—as, while simulating friendship and the kindest interest in his welfare, to be all the time secretly wishing and hoping that on the morrow some friendly shot would lay him low?

"Should he perish on the field of battle all would be well—there would then be no obstacle between Louise and me.

"So much did I dwell upon this idea that I almost overlooked the probability that I should be quite as likely to be slain as my friend.

"But I did not.

"While hoping for his death, I entirely forgot my own danger.

"It was a terrible fight—a more sanguinary one than had yet taken place.

"It commenced with the rising of the sun, and it only ceased when darkness again covered the plains, and after all that slaughter and carnage no advantage could be said to have been gained by either army.

"Eagerly I hastened to my captain's tent, hoping and fearing that I should not find him there.

"But my hopes were not realised.

"I saw him standing safe and unhurt.

"As soon as he caught sight of me his face lighted up with genuine joy, and, stretching out his hand, he congratulated me upon having escaped the perils of the fray.

"How different it was to my own base, heartless conduct!

"At that time I felt how guilty I had been.

"I own my protestations of friendship were on this occasion sincere.

"I resolved over and over again that I would forget all about Louise.

"In this humour I joined in the fight on the following morning, when it was resumed with additional fury.

"As long as I could I kept my eyes on him, but soon, in the confusion, I lost sight of him.

"Then, suddenly I felt a sharp, acute shock.

"I tried to stand—to move; but in vain—I fell down, and hundreds of soldiers rushed over my prostrate form.

"What took place after that I knew not, until, opening my eyes, I found myself in a tent.

"Bending over me, with earnest and affectionate solicitude, was my friend.

"'Heaven be thanked!' he said—'you are saved! I feared I had really lost you, my true and only friend! But you will recover now, and quickly—I am sure you will soon be well.'

"'And you, Dupont—have you again escaped?'

"'Yes, with the exception of a mere scratch, which is not worth thinking of.'

"At this time, I assure you, I received this intelligence with unfeigned pleasure.

"Contrary to the anticipations of the captain, I grew rapidly worse and worse.

"The surgeon came to see me, and shook his head.

"I might get better, he thought, but it was very doubtful.

"This was indeed poor consolation.

"I found that the fortune of war was against us.

"We had been defeated, and compelled to make a rapid retreat.

"All this had been done while I was insensible.

"We were now, it was believed, in a place of safety, and our generals were busy in concentrating their men, so as to be in readiness for another attack.

"My friend devoted himself to me unceasingly, and supplied my every want, and ministered to me as tenderly as a woman could have done.

"How pure and noble he seemed when contrasted with myself!

"I felt that I was a wretch, and unworthy to live.

"At last, so much did my remorse work upon me that I resolved to make a full confession of my baseness.

"I was moved to do this by what the doctor had said.

"He told me that there was no hope of my recovery—that I must die.

"'Surely,' I thought, 'as Dupont knows this, he will not mind if I confess to him the guilty passion that I have entertained.'

"Accordingly, I told him all, without reserve.

"To my surprise, as soon as I had finished he took hold of my hot and feverish hand, and pressed it kindly between his own.

"My friend,' he said, 'this raises you higher than ever in my estimation. I am glad that you have made this confession. I knew all about it from the first. Louise wrote and told me so.'

"I closed my eyes.

"I felt happier then than I had done for a long time.

"But the excitement caused my wound to break out afresh, and alarmed my friend greatly for my safety.

"But it turned out that this accidental circumstance in reality preserved my life.

"The fever passed away, and though the loss of blood left me in a frightful state of weakness, yet my wound healed, and I grew better daily.

"Still, I was only an invalid, and it would be some time before I should be able to resume active service.

"Therefore, I had a month's leave of absence granted me.

"The surgeon ordered me to repair to my native village, the air of which, he said, would do more to recover me than all the drugs he could administer.

"I confess I looked forward with delight to passing a short time among the scenes that were rendered dear to me by the remembrances of childhood.

"My friend, too, bade me a tender and affectionate farewell.

"Should you see Louise,' he said, 'tell her that I am well, and looking forward anxiously for the conclusion of the war. Tell her how I long to be in her society!'

"But you know," I said, "what I have confessed. It will be better for us not to meet again."

"As you will," he said. "That's a point for you to settle in your own mind. For my part, I know your worth so well, and have so much confidence in your friendship, that I do not feel afraid of the result. Still, you shall act exactly as you think proper."

"It was with this understanding that we parted."

"Never—never," I said to myself, over and over again, "will I betray such a trusting confidence! I should be the blackest monster if I did so! I will not yield to any weakness! I will not see Louise—nothing shall take me near her! I will go home to my native village, and there stay until my leave of absence has expired!"

"Would—would that I had adhered to that good and virtuous resolution! I should then, beyond a doubt, have been saved not only much guilt but much misery, for, as you will find, I have experienced more woe than usually falls to the lot of human beings."

"But I have deserved all—everything; and I am also conscious that my punishment is not yet over."

"But these remarks are from the point. I will continue what I have to say."

The old man's voice had grown very husky, and tears must have risen into his eyes, for he drew the dust-stained cuff of his threadbare coat rapidly across his face.

As for Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, they were so deeply interested in all they had heard, and so anxious to know what would be the result, that they were full of impatience because he paused, and they felt inclined to urge him to continue.

CHAPTER DCXCIX.

SHOWS HOW ONE CRIME WILL ALWAYS BE THE MEANS OF PRODUCING ANOTHER.

THE next half-mile of their journey to London was performed in silence.

The old man, they could see, made several efforts to speak.

But his voice failed him.

He tried to clear his throat of the huskiness that continually settled in it.

At last, making a powerful effort, and gazing beseechingly and deprecatingly into the countenances of his two companions, as if to ask them not to be too harsh upon him when they heard his confession, he resumed.

They understood the meaning of that glance.

They comprehended, also, the meaning of his hesitation.

It was because he had something to confess that would stamp him as a villain of the blackest dye.

"For some days after my arrival in my native village," he commenced, "I was happy enough."

"My journey in my weak state had fatigued me greatly, and I was glad to rest and recover my strength."

"But before a week was over, a wild, insatiable longing to see Louise once more came over me."

"I was able to recall everything that had formerly taken place between us."

"As on the preceding occasion, I reasoned and argued that perhaps I should never more be afforded the opportunity I had then."

"I had had one narrow escape of my life, and I might not be so fortunate another time."

"Besides, there could be no wrong—no harm—in simply seeing her."

"I had her husband's permission to do that—indeed, he had wished me to assure her of his safety."

"I need not tell how I struggled and argued with myself, and how at last I permitted myself to be conquered by this false reasoning."

"My weakness triumphed."

"I most solemnly declare, however, that my intention was only to call and see her, and speak to her, and say farewell."

"One morning I set out."

"On my arrival, I found that she was anxiously expecting me."

"She had had a letter from her husband, telling her of my wound and happy recovery, and stating that he had requested me to call."

"As soon as the first greeting was over, there was a constraint visible on both sides."

"For my own part, I did not strive to overcome it."

And the old man paused again abruptly, for his voice was choked by a sob that sounded almost like a groan.

"Excuse me," he said—"I cannot dwell upon this scene, nor upon what took place afterwards—your imagination can easily fill up the details."

"The first visit was innocent enough, but I was weak, and went again and again, until at length I forgot my vows and protestations of friendship, and Louise forgot the vows that she had made to her husband."

"Several weeks passed by in a kind of blissful, intoxicating dream."

"Then suddenly the spell was broken, for the term of my leave of absence had expired, and I was ordered back to rejoin our regiment."

"The remorse on both sides was great indeed."

"I know the extent of my own, and could form an idea of what were the feelings of Louise."

"Her peace of mind and happiness had flown for ever."

"We were compelled to part, for I knew the consequences of trifling with the order I had received, and as I journeyed on to the town where the regiment I belonged to then was, I wondered to myself how I should greet my friend and what I should say to him."

"You may easily imagine that I dreaded this prospect above all other things."

"I was ashamed of my conduct, and felt that I could not possibly look my much-injured friend in the face."

"It was indeed a most wretched journey altogether, and the only consolation I could find was indulging in the hope that I should discover he had fallen when I arrived."

"This enabled me to keep up my spirits a little."

"Moreover, I contrived to persuade myself that there was the utmost necessity for caution, otherwise all would be discovered."

"It was very late at night when I arrived, and, therefore, I was spared the trial of meeting with my friend."

"But I knew the evil moment could not be put off, as I ascertained upon inquiry that he was alive and well."

"In the morning I was calmer, and managed so to disguise my villany as to greet him as I used to do in former times."

"He inquired most eagerly and anxiously after Louise."

"How to answer him I knew not, and I am certain my answers were in the highest degree confused."

"But not much time for conversation was left us; we were much harassed by our foes, who, having the advantage over us in point of numbers, continually drove us back."

"The retreat was a most disastrous one, but our general determined once again to take the field, and therefore all the available forces were mustered and we were marched out."

"No particular engagement took place for some time, though there were continual skirmishes, in which we lost many men."

"But my rival—the man I called friend—seemed to bear a charmed life, and so did I, for we were neither touched."

"About three months afterwards we were driven back to the town from which we had set out, and this was well manned in every part, and got ready to stand a siege."

"It was about this time that I received a letter from Louise, stating that it would be impossible for her much longer to conceal the evidence of our guilt."

"The letter was blotted and smeared with tears that had fallen upon the paper while she was writing."

"How bitterly she repented and regretted the past."

"Every day she heard rumours of the end of the war, and she knew not how soon her husband might return, that which event, instead of being a source of the greatest joy to her, was a perpetual dread."

"What would be the result of his return home?"

"This letter almost drove me distracted."

"I was quite at a loss to know what to do or how to act."

"At one moment I felt ready to rush out and surrender myself a prisoner to the enemy, and at others to put an end to my wretched and unworthy life."

"Unfortunately for myself and all connected with me, I

lacked the resolution to carry out either of these purposes, and so time continued to roll on.

"Eventually it became known that an attack would be made upon the town on the following night, and if we were then defeated as we had been in every previous engagement the war would be declared at an end.

"Our generals would submit to the conquerors.

"Knowing this inspired every man with double courage and valour to do battle for his native land.

"They were not dispirited by the prospect; but, on the contrary, all were eager for the fray, hoping in this one night to turn the tables upon their foes.

"This bustle served to calm my mind to a great extent, for it prevented me from dwelling upon my evil deeds.

"We were besieged for a long time.

"The issue of the contest seemed very doubtful.

"One night my friend Dupont came to me and said that he had received orders to make a sortie from the walls and harass the foe.

"I was rejoiced to learn that I was to take part in this dangerous excursion, and I devoutly wished that it would terminate in the death of one or other of us.

"Both, I felt, could not live, and surely under all the circumstances it was better that my friend should die than myself.

"He was the one barrier not only to my happiness but the happiness of Louise; and if that barrier could only be removed, the past would no longer be a source of such poignant grief.

"I was thus reasoning with myself during the time we were making the preparations for the sortie.

"The appointed hour at last came, and we were all marshalled ready to sally forth.

"My friend seemed overcome by an unusual gloom.

"His spirits were entirely overcast.

"There is a presentiment of coming evil hanging over me," he said, as he wrung my hand at the last moment. "I wish I knew what form it would take."

"I could not answer him, for dark thoughts were brooding in my mind.

"How many times already he had escaped the hand of death, and, judging from the past, how slight was the probability that this would be his last engagement.

"I felt that it would be vain and foolish to make any calculations upon his destruction, and again and again I wondered how all this was to end.

"For my own part I felt that I was a base wretch, unfit to live, and I would have died willingly but for the remembrance of Louise.

"Her happiness I had every reason to believe was bound up in my own.

"She did not suspect one half of the villany that I had begun to contemplate.

"The sortie turned out a disastrous one.

"Our enemies by some means gained information of it, and came up in overwhelming numbers, striving to cut off our retreat.

"But our men performed prodigies of valour, and though many fell never to rise again, yet the remainder steadily made their way to the narrow portal through which they had emerged.

"Thus it happened that the group grew closer and closer to the wall, fighting with each other, and mingled in inextricable confusion.

"But our men stood firm, and I saw that we should be able to retire in safety.

"Just at this time I came closer to my friend.

"He was fighting desperately, but, as usual, was unhurt.

"I began to think that he bore a charmed life.

"Closer and closer still we came, until I was behind him.

"The conflict now was at its height.

"How easy," I thought to myself, "it would be to rid myself for ever of this obstacle to our happiness! Yes, it shall be done."

"This is what I had been long contemplating, and there was such a favourable opportunity of carrying out my fiendish purpose that I could not resist availing myself of it.

"Without staying to deliberate any further, I drew a pistol from my belt, raised it quickly to a level, and fired.

"In the confusion and riot that was going on around, the noise of the explosion was unnoticed.

"But I saw my friend turn round strangely in the saddle.

"I saw the blood pouring down from the wound which the bullet had made.

"He fixed his eyes reproachfully upon me, and then fell headlong from his steed, and I saw him no more.

"He was dead—at least, I feared so, for, strange as it may seem, now that the deed was done I regretted it, and wished that I had turned the pistol against myself instead.

"Moreover, I was a good deal alarmed by the thought that I might have been seen by some of my comrades, and if the act of assassination had been witnessed I knew what would be the consequences to myself.

"My mind at this period was in such a strange condition that I did not pay proper attention to what was going on around me, the consequence was that I received a sharp blow from a sabre, and the next moment found myself a prisoner in the hands of the enemy.

CHAPTER DCC.

THE OLD MAN PROVES HIMSELF TO BE AN EXAMPLE OF EARTHLY RETRIBUTION.

"THE wound I had received was only a slight one, but yet, owing to the state of my mind, I was thrown into a delirium, and I remained unconscious of what was going on for some time.

"When I recovered myself I found that the battle was over, the victory was won, the enemy had gained the advantage over us, and my countrymen had been compelled to submit to the terms they proposed.

"This having been done, the prisoners of war on both sides were set at liberty, and so I then found myself at liberty to turn my steps in whatever direction I thought proper.

"And now the very serious question presented itself to my consideration—what should I do?

"From Louise I had heard nothing for some time.

"I was not quite certain whether her husband was dead, nor was I sure that my base assassination had not been witnessed?

"Upon some of these points, however, it was easy enough to satisfy myself, and so I travelled on with the view of obtaining more information before I decided upon my future proceedings.

"Everything I heard appeared to be satisfactory.

"My friend Dupont was dead and buried.

"Some of his comrades had recovered possession of his body, and had interred it with all honour, for he was a great favourite with all.

"Every one admired him, and there was many a tear shed to his memory.

"It was also given out that I, instead of being instrumental in his death, had been killed while defending him from his numerous foes, but that my body had not been discovered.

"So far, then, surely all was well—I had nothing to fear: there was no reason why I should not disclose myself.

"I did so, and was overwhelmed with praises for my valour.

"I was complimented on all sides, and I was given my discharge.

"Then I asked myself should I—could I go to Louise?

"Although she and the world knew it not, my hands were red with his blood. The guilt of his murder lay heavy on my soul.

"Could I, under such circumstances as these, go to her—deceive her by declaring that the account she had heard of her husband's death was a correct one?

"Could I wed her after having slain her husband in so dastardly a fashion?

"For a long, long time I shrank from this, and yet I knew not where else to turn except towards her.

"All the old feeling of passionate love came strongly back to me.

"There was nothing I desired so much as to be with her.

"Should I then shrink back, now that I knew the barrier that had interposed itself between us was removed?

"I determined at length that I would not.

"My mind having been thus made up, I felt calmer.

"I journeyed on until I arrived at her residence,

"I fully intended to make her my wife.
 "Upon arriving I found that she was dangerously ill, and that her life was despaired of.
 "On making myself known I was immediately admitted.
 "I approached the bed she occupied with feelings of awe.
 "Those feelings were intensified when I caught a glimpse of her pale, wasted countenance as she raised her head with difficulty from the pillow.
 "Had not my punishment already commenced?
 "I felt that it had, for I had looked upon death too often not to know that her hours were numbered.
 "A feeble flash of joy overspread her countenance as she saw me advance and hold out my hand, which she pressed tightly between both her own.
 "'You have come back,' she said, 'and you have come back in time—only just in time.'
 "'In time for what?' I asked.
 "'To atone to some extent for our mutual crime. Send for a notary—be speedy if we must be married!'
 "'Now?' I exclaimed, starting back in astonishment.
 "'Yes, now—in an hour or so it may be too late.'
 "'But,' I said, 'this is extraordinary: what will be thought of such a proceeding?'
 "'I care not what may be thought, but I am dying—yes, surely dying; I know it, I feel it, and this marriage is the only way by which our shame may be covered, and our little ones brought into the world without disgrace.'
 "I tried, but vainly, to dissuade her from this project.
 "'So, in this strange, unnatural fashion, we were wedded—wedded while she was hovering between life and death.
 "'As soon as the ceremony was completed, a marked change for the worse took place.
 "'The surgeon who was there drew me aside and whispered:
 "'Say your last farewell now. I expect every moment that insanity will begin, and it will only close with her death, which must take place within an hour at the most. If she once loses her senses she will never regain them.'
 "'This was indeed dreadful—terrible news, and I groaned aloud in the bitterness of my anguish.
 "'I hastened again to the bedside, but was just a moment too late.
 "'The insanity of which the surgeon had spoken suddenly broke forth.
 "'She was mad—delirious—unconscious of all that was going on around her.
 "'She knew not me or anyone.
 "'Quietly, yet firmly, the surgeon led me from the room and closed the door.
 "'Mechanically I entered the next apartment.
 "'Then a succession of frightful shrieks and screams came upon my ears.
 "'In vain I clasped my hands over them and tried to shut out the dreadful sounds, but instead of dulling them it only seemed to make them more shrill and intense.
 "'I flung myself down upon the ground and groaned and wept.
 "'Miserable wretch that I was, what misery and unhappiness had I not produced by my own villany?
 "'What I suffered then you may perhaps be able to form some feeble conception of.
 "'Try if you can to place yourselves for a moment in imagination in my position, and judge what effect these dreadful events would have upon you.
 "'Presently I became conscious that the shrill screams were subsiding.
 "'In the same proportion I grew calmer.
 "'At last they ceased entirely, and then a long interval elapsed, during which I sat in a species of stupor.
 "'My heart seemed like a lump of ice in my breast, and the agony I suffered was almost beyond endurance.
 "'From this condition I was aroused by the pressure of a hand upon my shoulder.
 "'I looked up and saw the surgeon standing before me.
 "'He looked reproachfully into my countenance, and he said:
 "'The result is as I foretold.'

"Then she is dead?"
 "She is."
 "And—and—"
 "I paused, for I could not shape my lips to utter the next word.
 "But the surgeon understood the question I would have asked.
 "'Come,' he said, 'you shall see.'
 "Dreading the worst, and with my limbs trembling beneath me, he led me back into the other chamber—now the chamber of death.
 "The curtains were drawn closely round the bed, so that I could not see Louise.
 "But, in charge of a woman, who sat near the fire, were two infants—twins.
 Here the old man again paused.
 During his horrible confession he had become more and more bent down.
 He did not venture to look either of his hearers in the face.
 He dreaded to witness the expression they would wear.
 He continued, somewhat hastily:
 "Louise—unfortunate Louise—was buried, and, feeling that I was the most wretched and miserable of all created beings, I again enlisted as a soldier, trusting that war would quickly break out, and that an end would be put to my life.
 "The little children—one of whom was a girl and the other a boy—I gave in charge of the old woman who had first nursed them, and to whom I paid as much money as I could spare for their support.
 "Thus things went on for some years.
 "People pointed me out in the streets because of my melancholy, dejected attitude.
 "I never looked a fellow-being in the face if I could possibly avoid it.
 "I felt an irresistible impulse to grovel on the ground—to crawl somewhere out of sight.
 "But, to my great regret, I could hear nothing of the approach of war—there was no sign of it whatever.
 "Then I was sought out by a stranger—though a relative to poor Louise.
 "He told me that a considerable sum of money had been left to me in charge for the children.
 "This bequest was made by Louise's mother, who had lately died.
 "The amount, though not very large, was yet enough, when put out at interest, to support us in comfort.
 "I remained for a long time consulting with myself what I should do, and at last determined to resign my commission in the army, and to cross over into England, where I should be unknown.
 "I would have the children with me, and devote the whole of my time to make them happy.
 "I felt that in them lay my only earthly consolation.
 "When they grew a little older they would love me, and in their love I should be content.
 "This project, then, I may briefly say, I carried out.
 "I bought a house, and some land adjoining it.
 "The money I invested at a good rate of interest, and then withdrew into this solitude, determined to spend the remainder of my life with my children, who were inexpressibly dear to me.
 "And something like peacefulness then came over my soul.
 "Vain wretch that I was, I imagined that I had suffered enough for my crimes—that my punishment was over—instead of which, I soon found, it was only to begin.
 "Being myself an example of the awful results of crime and sin, made me especially careful to bring both my little ones up in virtue and rectitude, and this task I performed to the very best of my ability, for my whole heart was in it.
 "It was not long, however, before I discovered that I had difficult natures to deal with.
 "Instead of being full of that love for me, which I expected, they were morose and sullen, and half hated me.

CHAPTER DCCL.

THE OLD MAN RELATES HOW THE PUNISHMENT FOR HIS CRIME IS MADE COMPLETE.

"Day by day as they grew older so did their vicious natures become apparent.

"They must indeed have been corrupt, for I beheld the result after all my careful training and my endeavours to keep them from evil.

"If they had by chance been thrown upon the world and deprived of such care, what, then, would have been the result?

"Can you guess what a deep-seated grief this was to me?—a grief that grew greater every day, when I saw that all my strenuous efforts were productive of no good.

"It is true, they were but slight tokens that I judged by, but yet, to me, they were sufficient, and I sighed when I thought what would be the end if such propensities were not entirely overcome.

"This was the task I set myself.

"I tried hard to accomplish it, but uselessly.

"And so, with every day adding to my load of grief, the time passed on.

"The first blow that I received was dealt to me by my son.

"I kept him up to the age of sixteen, but then his character only seemed to have grown more and more settled in evil.

"For an act of wanton and barbarous cruelty which I had witnessed him practice, I severely chastised him, and locked him in a room.

"There I determined he should remain until he came a little to his senses.

"But, alas! to my grief and horror, in the morning on entering the room, I found that it was empty.

"The window was wide open, thus showing that he had made his escape.

"Some time elapsed before I could recover from the anguish which this discovery occasioned me, and, as soon as I calmed myself a little, I set out in search of him.

"But, like all my other efforts to reclaim him, it was in vain—he had gone, leaving no clue behind him.

"I looked upon my boy now as lost.

"My heart was almost broken, and I longed every day that I might fall into my grave.

"The girl, now that her brother was away, became more kindly in her disposition, and I had great hopes that here at least I should not reap bitter fruit.

"I grew more satisfied day by day, and strove to banish the remembrance of my son from my mind.

"He was not willing, however, that I should forget him.

"One night he had the audacity to return, in company with a villainous-looking rascal.

"He demanded money of me, with many oaths, and, being in fear of my life, I allowed him to take what little I had in the house.

"He cursed and swore, and behaved himself like a thorough ruffian.

"I found that he had become a professed thief, and that he was in continual communication with Jonathan Wild.

"Having obtained what he came for, my son departed, and I resolved to put it out of his power to pay me such another visit.

"This I knew I could do by changing my residence.

"I was already beginning to grow tired of England.

"I thought I would cross over to some other country.

"But upon speaking of my intention to my daughter, I found that she was much opposed to it.

"She declared that she would not go, and that fierceness of disposition which I trusted I had eradicated from her breast broke out with greater fury than I had ever before witnessed.

"I sternly told her, however, that I could listen to nothing she had to say upon such a matter.

"It was for her happiness as well as mine that we should move away.

"I told her so, and then she went, sobbing and crying, to her chamber.

"After awhile, I did not think so much of this as at first.

"I believed that her inclination to move away was caused by the fact that she had lived in that one spot nearly as long as she could remember.

"That night I was busy in making various preparations to start.

"I resolved not to remain after daybreak.

"But I over-calculated my strength, and, unconsciously fell off into a deep sleep, produced by sheer exhaustion.

"When I awoke the day was considerably advanced, and the first thing I did was to call my daughter.

"No voice replied.

"With a dreadful sensation at my heart, I searched the cottage, but, like her brother, she had gone—vanished I knew not whither.

"The cup of my wretchedness, I then thought, was full to overflowing.

"My two children, instead of turning out blessings and comforts to me, became a curse.

"From inquiries I made, I then found that the dissolute son of a wealthy man living in the vicinity had seen my daughter on several occasions and won her heart.

"Surely she must have inherited the sin of frailty from her unhappy parent.

"She could not bear the thought of going away from him.

"Moreover, he had long been urging her to elope.

"She took advantage of my sleep to depart, and, I grieve to say it, she carried away the few portable articles of value that I possessed.

"I wept—I tore my hair—I groaned, and went through a thousand such manifestations of unutterable grief, but all in vain—they brought no solace to me.

"But I resolved not to give up my children without a struggle.

"I sought for them far and wide, but to no purpose.

"Some time afterwards, I learned that she had accompanied this young spendthrift to London, and had there lived in wanton extravagance and open shame for several months.

"Then, growing tired of her, he shook her off as a useless incumbrance, leaving her to go where she liked—to live or die, or starve or steal, so long as he was troubled with her no more.

"It was easy for her to sink down lower and lower.

"She seemed, like my son, naturally depraved.

"They had inherited all the worst qualities of their miserable parents.

"In this condition my daughter met her brother, and he, lost to all sense of shame and honour, introduced her to the disgraceful company that he himself kept.

"He was then a noted thief, with half the officers in London ever on his track, and yet, by some strange means, he kept them all at defiance.

"I found out afterwards that this was in consequence of a compact that he had entered into with Jonathan Wild, who got him out of all these difficulties.

"Then, worse than all, Jonathan Wild beheld my daughter, and persuaded her to live with him.

"She did so, under the name of Mary Milliner."

Upon hearing this name, Blueskin and Jack exchanged rapid glances.

They knew and remembered perfectly well that violent and unscrupulous female.

The old man, bowed down by shame and grief, did not perceive the exchange of this look.

"When once this fiend in human shape had obtained command over my daughter, he treated her after his own brutal and vicious fashion.

"On one occasion my son witnessed a cowardly, ruffianly attack that he made upon her.

"Some spark of human feeling and justice yet lingered in his polluted heart, and, striding forward with an oath, he interposed.

"A violent struggle then took place between them, and the result was that he obtained the victory.

"Another moment would certainly have put an end to the life of the thief-taker, but then several of his followers, hearing the noise, rushed to his assistance, and seized my son, and bound him securely.

"Jonathan was furious with rage.

"He yelled out all manner of threats, and he kept them all.

"My boy was locked up in one of the cells beneath his house.

"From there he was taken before the magistrate, then brought up for trial, and found guilty of committing a highway robbery.

"He endeavoured, when placed at the dock, to give an account of his connection with Jonathan Wild.

"He made a long statement, but no one would listen to it or attach the least importance to it, for they believed the whole to be a fabrication; so the judge passed sentence of death upon him, and he was executed on the following Monday at Tyburn.

"Thus did Jonathan have his revenge upon my son, who unquestionably he made a thousand times worse than he would have been, had as his nature originally was.

"All this made a great noise, and it was then that I found out exactly who and what Jonathan Wild was, and when I learnt that my daughter, the once beautiful girl resembling so closely her unfortunate mother, was now living with him, and had become the most repulsive object in female form that the eye could possibly alight upon.

"Lost and degraded as she was, I made an effort to see her, and succeeded.

"I knelt down before her, and beseeched and entreated her to leave the way of life she was leading, and to accompany me, and endeavour to atone for her sins.

"But she only laughed, and scoffed, and mocked at me.

"My groans and my tears were alike disregarded, and at length she had me contemptuously turned into the streets.

"Was not this an awful though a just punishment for the crimes of which I had been guilty?

"What human justice could compare with this?

"But in spite of all this my heart yearned towards my daughter, as being the only thing left connecting me with this life.

"Oh, how I cursed and hated Jonathan Wild!—not only for dragging my boy to the scaffold, but for making my daughter such an abominable wretch.

"But she was hopeless, for he treated her with ever-increasing severity.

"His cruelty was beyond all bounds.

"He learned—of course in a moment of weakness—that she had a right to a large sum of money, which had been left in my charge until she should become of age.

"She was the sole inheritor of it, and, in order to obtain this money, Jonathan altered his demeanour.

"But as soon as the gold was handed over to him he recommenced his cruelties, and he continued them until, perhaps as you have heard, he murdered my poor girl in cold blood, and threw her, like a lump of carrion, into a hole hastily dug in the earth.

"And such was the end of both my children—such was the result of their vicious inclinations, and thus was my punishment made complete!"

CHAPTER DCCL

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD HAD GREAT HOPES OF COMING UP WITH JONATHAN WILD

THE old man ceased.

For some time his voice had been growing more and more inarticulate, and he pronounced the last words with heavy sobs between each.

Neither Blueskin nor Jack ventured to speak.

They only gazed at one another in silence.

But if their tongues were still their thoughts were busy.

What a terrible confession they had listened to.

It seemed as though no punishment could be too great for such crimes.

Yet what had not the old man suffered?

He had been wounded where he thought himself most secure, and yet in the tenderest part.

His children that he hoped would love him had both come to ignominious ends.

Finding that they continued silent, the old man again broke the silence, though it cost him a severe effort to do so.

"Do not judge me too harshly," he said. "No one could be more sensible of the enormity of my crimes than I am, but I repented—truly and sincerely repented, and I hope before it was too late. Yet, as you have seen, that repentance has availed me nothing. I am now feeble and almost at the end of my days," he added, "but as I said before, I have been told that Jonathan Wild's career of guilt has at last reached its termination, and that he has been captured by the officers of justice. I was told also that his execution would quickly follow, and it was in the hope of witnessing this that gave me strength and resolution enough to begin this long and weary journey. It is certain that but for your kindness I should never have accomplished it."

"You are quite welcome to all that we have done," said Blueskin, "and we are both very sorry for you. Great as your crimes have been, they sink into absolute insignificance when compared with those that Jonathan Wild has committed, and moreover, you have repented, and he has not."

"And never will," said Jack.

"He murdered my two children," said the old man, "and bad and corrupt as they were I loved them, and would have sacrificed my own life if by doing so I could have procured their happiness, but it was not to be—it was not to be."

"You have a long journey before you still," said Blueskin—"do you think you shall be able to accomplish it?"

"If I can meet with any kind strangers, yes."

"Have you the means of staying at any inn and procuring rest and refreshment?"

"Alas, no. I am a beggar."

"Well, then, as a proof that we commiserate you, here is money—take it, and do the best you can with it. And now we will say farewell, for we must part."

The old man tried to express his thanks for what he had received, but could not—his voice here altogether failed him.

Yet he looked wistfully and anxiously at both of them, as though he could have wished that he had their society.

Blueskin understood the glance, and replied:

"It is necessary that we should journey on at a much more rapid rate than your weakness will permit, therefore it is necessary that we should separate. Farewell."

"Farewell," said Jack.

As they thus spoke they increased the speed of their horses, and soon the old man was left behind.

Some time elapsed before the two friends addressed a word to each other.

But at last coming to the foot of a long, steep hill, they checked the speed of their horses and renewed their conversation.

"It's a terrible history that we have been listening to!" said Jack—"such a one as I should not care to hear again!"

"You are right!" said Blueskin. "And yet I can find abundance of pity for such a man."

"So can I—so can I! After sinning so deeply, what a disappointment it must have been to him, upon his return, to find that the woman he had stained his soul for was in the agonies of death!"

"Don't allude to it any further, Jack. I would gladly forget all about that adventure and our preceding one. Let us think of Jonathan Wild."

"With all my heart! And yet what can we say, or what conclusion can we arrive at until we reach London?"

"How much longer do you think it will take us?"

"Eighteen hours at the very least—perhaps twenty-four."

"That's a long while. But come—let us make the best speed we can."

The top of the hill was now reached, and before them the road lay straight and level for a considerable distance.

Accordingly, their horses put forth excellent speed.

They neared London rapidly.

So well did they follow the course that the police officers had taken, that they rode over the bridge where Jonathan had made such a miraculous escape.

Little did they think that anything of this kind had occurred.

In imagination they could only see their enemy tied securely to a police officer, and riding behind him on his horse, with all the others clustered round, and keeping a sharp eye upon him.

Under these circumstances, escape was a thing not to be thought of, nor did they believe that the officers would relax in their vigilance.

After all their trouble, they would, having captured him, take every precaution to prevent his escape.

It was a great pity that Jack and Blueskin should have been so confident about the officers keeping their prisoner secure.

But for this feeling of confidence they would have continued to make their inquiries along the road.

But they did not, for, as they drew closer to London, they knew that the chances of their discovery were very much increased.

Above all things it would be necessary to keep out of the way of any of the officers of police.

It thus happened that they journeyed right on to the metropolis before they heard one word about Jonathan's escape.

Their rage and vexation may perhaps be imagined when they did hear it.

At first they were incredible.

Upon strict inquiry, however, they found that the evil tidings were indeed too true.

Mr. Noakes, and Mr. Noakes alone, had been brought into London.

Certainly the officers had looked well after him, and he had received the punishment due to his crimes.

But it was not Mr. Noakes that our friends were so anxious to secure.

It was Jonathan Wild.

Had Mr. Noakes escaped they would not have troubled themselves any further in the affair.

Now instead of having, as they fondly hoped, reached the end of their dangerous campaign, they were only on the threshold of it—they had to begin all over again.

Going to a retired public-house, the two friends entered a private room and sat down to discuss their future proceedings.

There seemed nothing for them to do, however, but ride off again and endeavour to get upon Wild's track, and then follow him up closely and persistently until they overtook him.

They sat debating for a long time, and then retired to rest, for they were thoroughly worn out.

At the close of the next day, they started again upon their expedition.

They found, upon sallying forth, that Jonathan Wild, accompanied by some one else, who undoubtedly was his son, had had the audacity to venture again into London.

This fact, astounding as it seemed to them, admitted of no dispute, for they saw not only announcements in the papers offering rewards for their apprehension, but also bills stuck up at every conspicuous place.

"Surely," said Jack, as he saw them, "this must be sufficient to rouse the police officers into action. Certainly Jonathan Wild is doomed to destruction."

Blueskin shook his head.

"I am beginning to feel doubtful."

"I don't wonder at it. Who would?"

"We should never be able to feel sure of him again—no, not even if he is a prisoner in the cells of Newgate."

"Very true," said Jack. "We must not trust to the cleverness of the police officers, that's certain. But such a commotion will be created by these events that we shall hear tidings of him on all sides."

"I hope so. I should be glad enough to receive any definite information respecting their whereabouts."

It was easy enough to ascertain which direction the police officers had taken in order to commence their pursuit, and it was easy for Jack and Blueskin to follow them.

But what they wanted was to get first, and to obtain some independent information of their own.

It was also requisite that they should keep at a safe distance from the officers, who might be disposed to ask them some very troublesome and inconvenient questions.

At one roadside inn they were told that the police officers could not be more than a mile or a mile and a half in advance of them.

"Come," said Blueskin, "we shall do now! I believe if we take to the meadows it will be easy for us to get in advance of them, and at the next inn we will try whether we can learn anything respecting those we seek."

The officers had tracked Jonathan Wild with considerable accuracy.

Blueskin and Jack, by taking to the meadows, easily got on the road before them, and the next public-house they happened to arrive at was the one where Jonathan and his son had stopped to rest themselves and their horses.

Blueskin merely gave a description of them, and inquired whether they had seen anyone answering to such a description, either riding past the house or calling there.

The appearance of Jonathan was too peculiar and remarkable to pass unnoticed by anyone, and therefore as soon as Blueskin spoke the landlord remembered him.

"Why, yes," he said, "just such a looking man as you describe called here with another very much younger than himself, and here they remained for some hours."

"And do you know which way they went when they left?"

"I only know that they appeared to continue their journey," was the reply. "They came along the road, as if from London."

"Enough," said Blueskin. "You have given us valuable and important information."

The two friends were not likely to be in the humour to stay at this inn after the receipt of such important news.

Their horses had been supplied with a little hay and water while this conversation had been going on, and Blueskin and Jack had some slight refreshment themselves.

Now they sprang into the saddles, and rode off at full speed down the road.

"Hurrah!" said Jack. "I begin to feel more hopeful now. Surely we shall have him at last! Oh, what a triumph it will be to me if I can only seize him, overpower him, and leave him helpless on the roadway to fall into the hands of the police as soon as they come riding by!"

"We will do that," said Blueskin, "or something very like it. He cannot be very far on the road before us. We must of necessity overtake him before long. The clue grows more and more distinct."

CHAPTER DCCIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON HOLD A CONSULTATION AS TO THE BEST MEANS BY WHICH THEY MAY OBTAIN FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THEIR PLANS.

WE return now to the proceedings of Jonathan Wild and his son George.

It will be remembered that the latter had expressed himself with great confidence as to the results he should be able to achieve by carrying off Edgworth Bess.

That, he felt sure, would make them entirely masters of the field of action.

They would be able, as he expressed it, to dictate their own terms with the knowledge that no matter what they demanded it would be acceded to.

"Yes," said Jonathan in reply, "but you must bear in mind that this is our last chance."

"Well, what of that?"

"If it fails us, what then?"

George shrugged his shoulders.

"It will be all over with us then, guv'nor, and no mistake, for that reason we must not fail—we must succeed."

"It's very well to say that, but we can't make sure of it."

"Yet it appears to me that we have no very difficult thing to do—we have only to keep a good watch, and at the proper moment seize her and carry her off."

"It sounds easy enough, I admit, but then, for one difficulty, we don't know where she is at the present time."

"But we can find out, guv'nor—at least, I mean to do so."

"How?"

"Never mind how—it must be done. To my mind there is a much more serious and important objection than any that you have mentioned."

"What is it?"



[JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE MANSION.]

"Why, we are infernally short of funds, guv'nor. What with this riding up and down the country, and submitting to the extortion of landlords, the end of my purse is almost reached, without you have a supply."

"No—no, George, I have not a farthing left; you know I gave the last I had to you."

"And what could you have done better with it?" asked George.

"Let us have no folly."

"Well, guv'nor, I will be as serious as you like. Money we must have—that's quite certain."

"Quite."

"And if you will give it a thought, rather large funds will be required in this little enterprise; don't you think so?"

"I do."

"Well, then, can you tell me the easiest means by which that money can be obtained?"

No. 149.—BLUESKIN.

Jonathan Wild hesitated.

He thought of the money that he had buried in the ground, and which he firmly believed remained where he had placed it.

Should he trust his reprobate son so far as to tell him of this secret hoard, and conduct him to it?

That was a question Jonathan could not make up his mind to reply to all at once.

George noticed his hesitation, and was impatient accordingly.

"What are you thinking about, guv'nor?" he asked.

"What are you pondering over? Come, there must be no secrets between us, or else we part."

"I was thinking," said Wild, slowly—"I was thinking—"

"Well, of what?"

"Of how the money we want can be easiest obtained—but, for my part, I can only see one way."

"And what way is that?"

"Why, we must stop the first persons we meet, and compel them to hand over."

"That was all I could think of," said George; "but then that is open to a serious objection."

"I know it is."

"The officers you may depend are not very far away from us, and a little affair on the highway like you mention would be just the thing to bring them down upon us."

"So it would."

"But we must not forego our purpose for the sake of that."

"Is there no other way?" asked Jonathan, for now he had made up his mind that he would keep the miser's hoard a secret.

The more he reflected, the more certain he felt that this was the right course for him to take.

Even if his son George proved faithful after coming in for a share of this wealth—and it was very doubtful—he would be better off if he kept it as a last resource.

But then, George might be tempted to seize the whole and decamp, leaving him to fight his own battles as best he might.

The hopeful youth had done the same thing more than once before, and it was very likely that he would do so again.

So—very wisely, we think—Jonathan resolved to trust his son no further.

The secret of the hidden money he would keep treasured up in his own breast until some other time, when there might be a more pressing need for it.

"What do you say to cracking a crib somewhere, guv'nor?" asked George. "We might manage that on the quiet, I think, and without anyone believing that we had a hand in it. What do you say?—are you willing?"

Jonathan considered a moment, and then he said:

"Why, of the two, I think there will be less risk in that. We must look out for some suitable and convenient place, and, moreover, it must be a place that will repay us for our work."

"Oh yes, decidedly! It would never do to have all that trouble, and then only carry off a few guineas. We must make a good booty, guv'nor—that's quite certain."

"Well, then, we will say 'agreed' upon that."

"Very well. If we only meet with tolerable luck, the money we shall get hold of then will be enough to answer our immediate purpose. Then, guv'nor, for our one grand last trial, and, as it is our only hope, we must succeed; if we don't, there will be utter ruin before us."

None knew this better than Jonathan himself.

But the failures that he had recently met with, when he had imagined himself so very safe, made him doubtful of all.

But a burglary in some quiet, out-of-the-way spot was far more to his liking than crying "Stand!" on the highway.

There was much more danger to life and limb in this latter mode of proceeding, and, moreover, the officers would be more likely to track them in consequence of it.

Striking off at right angles across the country from the direction they had previously taken, Jonathan and his son rode for many miles without coming to a halt.

At length they pulled up on the skirts of a thickly-wooded plantation.

They were tired, and so were their horses, and they imagined that here they should be able to rest in safety and security.

Accordingly they dismounted, and plunged among the trees.

Coming at length to a place that suited them, they halted.

The horses were glad to crop some of the sweet grass, and to slake their thirst at a little brook that wound its way among the roots of the tall trees.

"We must have something to eat, guv'nor," said George. "What danger will there be, do you think, in knocking over a bird?"

"I don't know—it is impossible to tell. Some of the

gamekeepers may be watching close at hand, in which case, upon hearing the report, they would rush towards us and try to take us prisoners."

"Well, guv'nor, we will just have a look round, and if we find all quiet, why, we will take the risk, for we cannot stay here and starve."

The two villains tramped about among the bushes and trees for some time.

But not finding any signs of gamekeepers or persons of any description, George Wild took confidence.

In the plantation all the living creatures seemed tame enough.

They would certainly be able to pick one off with a pistol.

George took aim, and brought one down.

Their next proceeding was to light a fire, and they cooked the bird in a primitive fashion.

But they were hungry, and despatched it eagerly. They were in no humour to find fault with their own cooking.

From the last inn they had stopped at they had brought a large bottle of brandy, and this, mixed with a little of the water in the brook, served to wash down their repast very well.

"Now, guv'nor," said George, "as we have made ourselves all comfortable, suppose we take a peep around us."

"With all my heart."

"It is just growing dusk now, guv'nor, so we shall not be in much danger of being seen."

"Where do you think of going?"

"Through to the other side of this plantation. Rely upon it, there's a gentleman's residence somewhere not far off, and if so, and we find all things convenient, we will make an attack upon it this very night."

This agreement having been made, they secured their horses to a tree, and pushed their way through the thickets and masses of undergrowth that obstructed their progress.

After more than half an hour's hard walking they reached the other side of the plantation.

They did not venture to emerge from the trees, but stood so that they could command a view of the scene before them.

Twilight was now fast deepening into night, but yet it was not so dark as to prevent them from seeing around them tolerably well.

"I told you so," said George, suddenly. "I knew I was right—look there!"

He pointed as he spoke to a well-built, imposing-looking mansion that was situated on the summit of a slight eminence.

The ground sloped down gently from it on all sides.

The grounds around it, consisting of lawns, and meadows, and gardens, were in the highest state of cultivation, and altogether presented an appearance that would have gladdened the eyes of anyone who looked upon them except the two wretches who seemed now to be actually profaning it with their gaze.

"That's the place for us, guv'nor," said George. "If we can once manage to get in there, I'll warrant we shall find plenty of things well worth carrying off—don't you think so?"

"I do. And do you observe that the blinds are all drawn down?"

"Yes—I can see it, now you mention it, guv'nor. What sharp eyes you must have!"

"They used to be, George," said Jonathan, with a sigh; "but every now and then there comes over me a strange feeling——"

"Oh, bother your feelings!"

"A feeling that I can't describe," continued Jonathan—"one that tells me that the end of my course is nearly reached."

"You should take a pull at the brandy bottle, guv'nor, and you would soon get rid of such ridiculous fancies as those. But what were you going to say about the blinds being down?"

"Why, I think we may conclude from it that the owners of the house are not there, and that the place is in charge of servants."

"Yes," said George, "we can conclude that, guv'nor, and how easy that makes the task we have proposed. If

we have only servants to deal with, we may make sure of ransacking the place."

"But there's a disadvantage connected with it," said Jonathan, for he had had great experience in matters of that sort.

"What's that?"

"Why, it is not likely that there will be very many portable articles of value left—such things are generally carried away."

CHAPTER DCCIV.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON ENDEAVOUR TO EFFECT AN ENTRANCE INTO THE MANSION.

"Yes, to be sure, there's an objection," said George, thoughtfully, rubbing his head. "That did not occur to me. Upon my word, guv'nor, you are rather a useful man to have in an affair of this sort."

"I ought to know something about such matters. I have planned many such affairs in my time."

"I know you did, guv'nor, and I always admired your style of doing business. You took the largest share of the profits, did none of the work, and ran no risk."

Jonathan did not reply to this speech, but turned round, and, placing his hands over his eyes, looked scrutinisingly at the mansion.

George no sooner saw what he was about than he followed his example.

"Yes," said Jonathan, at length—"you may depend I am right—the place looks perfectly deserted."

"We shall soon know, shall we not?" said George.

"When they begin to light up the house, if we see a light at one or two windows only, we may make sure that we shall meet with very little interference. But, guv'nor—"

"What?"

"If they are only servants left in charge, suppose we were to walk up to the place and ask for admittance? They would, ten to one, let us in, and then what a deal of trouble we should be saved!"

"It would not do in this case," said Jonathan, emphatically. "It succeeds sometimes. It won't do now."

"But why not?"

"Our appearance would go against us. They would not let us in, or, if they did, they would keep such a sharp eye upon us that we should be able to do nothing."

"Then you are in favour of waiting until they have all retired to rest, and then breaking in?"

"Yes."

"But our tools? What shall we do without tools?"

"The best we can," said Jonathan. "We are ill provided, but yet we shall find some weak point or other where we may creep in."

"Well, guv'nor, I shall defer to you entirely. I will be content for once to place myself under your directions."

"You can't do better, George. But somehow I feel so low-spirited and dull to-night that—"

"Why don't you drink some brandy, guv'nor?"

"I can't drink it. It seems cold, and as weak as water."

"I like that, guv'nor!" said George, with a laugh. "The idea of brandy being cold! Who ever would have thought of such a thing?"

Jonathan smiled grimly; but it was quite evident, from his manner and from his speech, that he was very low in spirits.

He had no heart for the enterprise before him.

"Shall we watch from here?" asked George.

"I think we may as well."

"And our horses?"

"We will leave them where they are. They will be safe."

The two villains then flung themselves down at full length upon the grass between the trees, and, concealed by the dark shadow that they cast, remained with their eyes fixed upon the mansion.

They observed with satisfaction that lights appeared at only one or two of the windows.

This strengthened Jonathan's supposition.

A long, weary time it was to elapse between then and

the hour when all the inmates could be supposed to be asleep, for Jonathan sank off into a gloomy silence, and would not be spoken to.

George fortified himself from time to time with copious draughts of the brandy, and encouraged Jonathan to follow his example.

"It's all right, guv'nor," he said. "Don't spare it; drink it up—we shall soon have plenty more."

"When?"

"To-night, when we get inside yonder. I'll warrant we shall find more brandy than we shall care about carrying away with us."

"Very likely."

"Well, then, drink it up, and don't be afraid."

Jonathan took a hearty pull at the brandy, which apparently he drank just as he would have drunk cold water.

Still George failed in his efforts to draw him into a conversation.

Accordingly, he cursed and swore horribly, which was the only amusement he could find to make time pass by.

As the hour grew later and later, however, he took out his weapons, and got them in readiness for immediate use.

He had a large clasp-knife, with a long, heavy blade, and with this he expected to be able to do a good deal.

It would have to serve the purpose that other house-breaking implements would be put to.

It was a murderous-looking weapon—one that could scarcely be gazed upon without an unpleasant sensation.

Then, one by one, the lights in the mansion began to fade out.

Seeing this, Jonathan aroused himself from his half-dormant state.

"The time is approaching," said George—"get all in readiness."

"I am ready," was the reply, "except looking to the primings of my pistols, and that I shall leave until the last moment. Curse them—what a while they are, to be sure!"

"They are a long while, guv'nor; but look—there goes one more light! The house will soon be in darkness now."

This assertion was quickly verified, and one light was observed to flit past many of the windows, as though the bearer of it was engaged in securing various doors and windows.

Then they saw it on the upper story, and again up above.

Here it burned for a considerable time, looking like a small star.

At last it was extinguished.

"I should think we might venture to creep a little closer now, guv'nor," said George, "and begin to reconnoitre."

"No, no," said Wild—"not just at present! Precipitation will ruin all! Wait—wait!"

This, under the circumstances, was a difficult thing for Wild junior to do, as his patience was exhausted already.

In this manner about half an hour elapsed, and at the end of that time Jonathan re-primed his pistols.

"Are you ready to go a little nearer now?" asked George.

"Yes—we will creep forward gently, but we must not attempt to effect an entrance for some time."

"I know that; but we have a great deal to do. Recollect that we have no idea at present how the house can be best approached."

"That will not take us long," said Wild; "but by the time we have done it, we may venture to make the attempt."

"Come along, then, for I am tired of waiting in this place."

Stealthily and slowly, like two beasts of prey that never venture forth until the darkness to commit their depredations, Jonathan and his son left the shade of the trees, and crept towards the house.

They sheltered themselves as well as they were able by means of the trees and hedgerows, taking every precaution to remain unseen, for although there did not appear to be anyone about, yet there was great necessity for caution.

Such a mode of progress as this must of necessity be tedious, and therefore some time elapsed before they at length stood before the front entrance of the mansion.

It was a substantial edifice, built of dark red bricks. The windows were small, and fitted with the usual diamond-shaped panes.

Through one of these Jonathan hoped to be able to make his way easily, and so he said to George.

"I shouldn't wonder, guv'nor—and this little toothpick of mine will be just the thing to take the panes out, and then I can put my hand in and undo the fastening easily."

George produced the huge clasp-knife of which we have spoken, and with the point of the blade easily bent back the lead-work in which the panes were fastened.

A small piece of glass was soon removed, and he took it out carefully, so as to prevent its fall making any sound.

Then he placed his arm through the aperture he had made, but immediately withdrew it with an execration.

"We're done, guv'nor!—we sha'n't get in so easily as we thought."

"Why?—are there shutters?"

"No—but bars of iron placed across, and so close together that we could not possibly squeeze through."

"Then it's no good thinking of trying to get in by that means," said Jonathan. "Let's look a little further—we shall manage it after awhile, no doubt."

They moved off slowly, but the house looked as impenetrable as a castle.

Turning round the corner to the west, they came upon another window.

Jonathan placed his eyes close to it and looked in.

But he found that, like the other, it was protected with upright iron bars.

"We must try the upper story," he said—"those windows will not be secured like that, you may depend."

"Why not go round to the back?" said George.

"Because we are better here."

"How so?"

"In the yard there is probably a dog, perhaps more, and should we be heard, such a barking would be set up as would rouse everybody."

"Very true, guv'nor; but how are we to get to any of the upper windows?—that's the question."

"We will go round to the east side," was the answer.

"You know, as a general rule, there is a balcony or verandah running along one side of a house of this kind, and if so, it will be easy for one to assist the other up."

"So it will, guv'nor. Come along, and let us see."

"Hush!—don't speak any louder than a whisper, and tread as lightly as your feet can fall—it would be a thousand pities to create an alarm."

Wild junior thought so, and for that reason did not give any reply.

He followed Jonathan in silence.

A few minutes took them round to the east side of the house, and there, sure enough, as had been expected, was a balcony running the whole length of it.

"This is the very thing," said Wild; "and look!—yonder is a kind of staircase leading down on to the lawn. Why, we shall have no trouble at all!"

Jonathan Wild was correct.

From one end of the balcony there was a rustic flight of steps, so that anyone upon it might descend into the garden without taking the trouble to go down the principal staircase and out at the front door.

"Wait a moment," said Jonathan, as he paused at the foot of it—"we will listen before we venture to go any further."

CHAPTER DCCV.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON SUCCEEDED IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE TO THE MANSION.

FINDING that the intense silence was unbroken, however, Jonathan silently and noiselessly ascended the winding flight of stairs.

George followed in his footsteps, and, in spite of all their precautions, they could not avoid making a slight creaking sound.

Yet it was no more than the wind might easily have

produced, and therefore they did not feel the least alarm in consequence.

Even if anyone in the house heard it, which was not likely, they would take no notice of it.

Jonathan touched George upon the shoulder, and then placed his finger on his lips.

Now that they were so close, it would be by far the best to work by signs and not by speech.

Jonathan crept along until he came to the window.

Here he stopped, and pressing his face close to the glass, peeped in.

Owing to the darkness, he could obtain only a very imperfect view of the interior.

Yet what he saw satisfied him that all was well.

He made a sign to George, which that worthy instantly comprehended.

The services of his clasp-knife were again called into requisition.

The lead round one of the panes was gently forced back.

The diamond-shaped piece of glass was extracted.

Placing his hand through the aperture thus made, George felt for the fastening.

It was of a very simple kind, and yielded to his fingers at once.

Upon this upper floor there were no bars to the windows as there were before, therefore the window opened gently and silently to their touch.

They crouched down and held their breath, for, for aught they knew, discovery was about to follow.

But still the silence continued, and again touching George lightly, Jonathan rose up, and stepped into the chamber.

Although it was night and there was no light in the room, yet Jonathan and his son had been so long in the darkness that they were able to make out with tolerable accuracy the various objects that were around them.

They discovered immediately that it was a bed-chamber into which they had intruded.

In one corner was a large bedstead, and whether this was occupied by any sleeper was more than they could tell.

They listened vainly for the sound of regular breathing.

"It's all right, guv'nor," George ventured to say, in a whisper. "We are lucky! This room is vacant."

"So it seems. But hush!"

"I will be as silent as the grave, guv'nor."

"Mind you are."

"Will it be safe to show a light?"

"Yes, if you have one."

"Well, then, guv'nor, here you are—as nice a little lantern as anyone need wish! I will light it in an instant."

George produced a small lantern from one of his pockets, and proceeded to light it.

"I didn't know you had that!" growled Jonathan.

"Very likely."

"Why didn't you speak before? It would have been of service to us on the outside."

"It will be better here, guv'nor," was George's reply.

"Now, then, we shall see what there is to be seen."

He flashed the light around him.

But the room contained only such ordinary articles of furniture as may be found in almost any sleeping apartment.

On a bed was something white, and, impelled by curiosity, they advanced to see what it was.

Even George Wild started, strong as his nerves were.

What he saw upon reaching the bedstead gave him a shock.

Jonathan started too, and it was lucky he did not hold the lantern; if he had, it would doubtless have fallen from his trembling fingers.

Lying out at full length, and covered only by a white sheet, was a corpse, evidently, from the long, dark hair, that of a woman.

It must not be supposed, however, that there was anything repulsive in the appearance of this dead body.

On the contrary, so far as the aspect of the features and the expression of the countenance went, one might almost think that it was sleep, not death.

But the jaw had fallen, and there was an unmistakably

glassy appearance in the small portion of the eyes that was visible through the partially-closed lids.

For some time Wild and his son continued to gaze upon this spectacle.

But there were particular reasons why they should do so, and why the sight should interest them.

The long, dark hair was ornamented by a row of pearls twisted among it, and on the cadaverous neck was a pearl necklace, the whiteness of which contrasted horribly with the skin on which it reposed.

Whether upon the hands or arms there were any other valuables of a like nature the two intruders could not tell, for from the neck downwards all was covered by the sheet.

"Guv'nor," said George, in a whisper, "we're in luck, and no mistake!"

Jonathan shuddered.

"Surely—surely," he said, "you would not——"

"What?"

"Lay a hand upon those things?"

George turned round and contemplated his parent with a stare of blank astonishment.

"Well, guv'nor, curse me if I can make you out at all! I can only account for your whims and ways in one manner."

"How is that?"

"Why, I'll be d——d if you are not drawing to an end—your life, I mean! When people begin to grow good all at once, it's a very bad sign."

"No, no, George—don't speak in that way, and don't interfere with any of these articles. Let us penetrate further into the house, for depend upon it, if they would decorate a corpse in that fashion, we shall find plenty of valuables belonging to the living."

"That's the most rational speech you've made to-night, guv'nor," replied his son, "and we will see what truth there is in it."

"Come, then."

They moved slowly from the side of the bed towards the door.

They were easily able to maintain silence, for the room was covered by a thick carpet, upon which their footfalls produced no sound.

The door, to their annoyance, they found was locked.

The key had been turned in the lock by some one on the other side, and left sticking there.

"Hold the light, guv'nor," said George. "Let me see whether my clasp-knife will be of any good in this case."

He drew forth the weapon again, and inserted its point into the box of the lock.

By working at it gently and carefully, he gradually got the bolt back, until, having reached a certain distance, it was carried back altogether by the spring.

A sharp snap was the result.

A slight sound, it is true, but yet one that was, in the darkness and silence, loud enough to startle the two burglars.

For some time neither ventured to move; but at length, considering that no alarm had been given, Jonathan slowly opened the door.

He still carried the lantern, but he took the precaution to cover it over with the skirt of his coat.

Upon stepping into the passage and finding all was dark, however, he once more allowed the light from its lens to stream forth.

"Let us go downstairs," said George, "and try and find the plate first. I'll warrant there's plenty, if we can only get to the right place. After that, we will try what ready money and other valuables there may be on the premises."

This was consented to.

A few steps brought them to the head of the staircase.

They descended.

Jonathan was tolerably familiar with the interiors of most houses, and now, after standing for a moment or two at the foot of the staircase, he was able to say with tolerable precision into what rooms such and such doors would be likely to open.

"This way, George," he said—"this way! We shall be all right!"

He paused before an ordinary-looking door.

"Open that," he said, briefly.

George set to work, and after a few minutes' labour the door receded upon its hinges.

Passing through a small apartment, they came to another door, which, from its appearance, was evidently a very strong one.

What was greatly in favour of the burglars, however, was, that all the fastenings were on this side, and were plainly to be seen.

Yet it was quite certain that some time would elapse before they could possibly get the door open.

Jonathan, fearful of a discovery, was unwilling to make the attempt.

But George was determined.

He set to work forthwith.

Considering that he was unprovided with house-breakers' tools, he made very satisfactory and rapid progress.

In less than twenty minutes the door yielded.

Crossing the threshold, they found themselves, as they fully expected, in the plate-room.

The plate was not lying about, however, just convenient and ready to their hands, but it was locked up in various strong-looking boxes that would require both strength and time to open.

But none of these obstacles served to cast down George Wild.

On the contrary, they seemed to rouse him to make fresh and greater exertions, and he no sooner espied these boxes than with great resolution he commenced an attack upon one of them.

There was no other weapon that they could work with, so Jonathan was compelled to comparative inaction.

He could only assist his son by holding the light.

This, however, under the circumstances, was most material aid, and facilitated George's progress exceedingly.

He broke several pieces off the end of the blade of his knife.

But at last he was rewarded by the lid of the box flying open.

A quantity of various articles of plate was displayed to their view.

"Hurrah, guv'nor!" he said, drawing his arm across his brow. "It's been warm work, but this is reward at last!"

"Yes," said Jonathan, with sparkling eyes. "The question is, how shall we get it away?"

"That ought not to be an obstacle now," said George. "Just show a light in this next room. I believe I saw a bag there that will answer our purpose."

To the next room they accordingly went.

But they found no bag.

A basket of rather unusual dimensions was, however, hanging upon one of the walls, and this Wild junior appropriated with a cry of delight.

"Now, guv'nor," he said, "bundle in the swag! Be quick, but don't make a noise—we may as well get quietly off as not."

CHAPTER DCCVI.

IN WHICH GEORGE WILD MEETS WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE, AND HAS TO MAKE A PRECIPITATE RETREAT.

"Of course you will not attempt to open any of those other boxes?" said Jonathan.

"No, we shall be obliged to leave them as they are; not only would it take too much time, but the weight of the plate would be more than we could carry away."

"Yes, let us be content," said Jonathan, "with what we have. We can open one of those doors easily, no doubt, and get off without raising the least alarm."

"I don't quite see the force of that, guv'nor," said George.

"Why not?"

"Because I think that in the house there is plenty of portable property, such as cash and jewels, and I think, too, that they are to be had with a very little trouble."

"Don't run the risk," said Jonathan. "Take my word for it, it will be the best policy to remain contented with what we already have."

"Don't be a fool, guv'nor—you know nothing at all about it. That which we have we cannot turn into money very readily; moreover, we want cash for immediate use, and, what's more, now I'm here I mean to have it."

Jonathan Wild gave a sigh, but said no more.

It was strange indeed to find that his nature had so greatly altered.

He who had always been so domineering over everyone completely succumbed to his son.

But George had a bold, defiant, reckless spirit, while Jonathan was worn out with the hard life that he had led for so long.

"Well, leave the basket down here in the hall, guv'nor," said George, "and then we will go upstairs together, and try what we can find."

"No," said Jonathan, faintly; "I will stay here and mind it."

"Not if I know it, guv'nor. You come along—don't shrink your share of the work!"

"But I would rather stay."

"Oh, no doubt! Perhaps you might fancy you heard some one coming while I was gone, and open the door, and cut off with the swag. No, guv'nor, I shall trust you just as far as I can see you. I don't intend to allow you to go out of my sight."

"Very well, then," said Jonathan; "lead on, and I will follow you."

Up the staircase, accordingly, the two villains crept. They shuddered slightly as they passed the door of the room in which the corpse lay.

The next moment they paused before another door at no great distance off.

Listening for awhile, George ventured to turn the handle slowly.

Then, inch by inch, he pushed the door open.

Still all remained silent.

So, making a sign to Jonathan, he stepped in on tiptoe.

A dim light was burning in this room, and upon entering it further, George perceived a night-lamp burning upon a bracket.

This shed a dim but uniform light all over the apartment, and it was sufficiently bright to enable him to see all objects as distinctly as he wished.

First of all, he went to the dressing-table.

On this were a couple of watches of beautiful manufacture, with long, massive chains attached to them.

These disappeared in an instant, and so did several other trinkets of less worth that were lying near them.

There was also a curiously-carved casket, which, from its size and general outward appearance, George felt certain contained nothing but jewels.

This he handed over to the keeping of his parent, while he continued his search.

In the dressing-table were several drawers, one of which George forced open.

This contained a leather bag filled full to the top with money, though of what kind he could not tell, as the mouth was tied up.

This he placed in his pocket, and then, having satisfied himself by a hasty glance around that there was nothing else in sight that would be worth carrying away, he quitted the chamber without having aroused the person or persons who occupied it.

Jonathan had, however, all the time been in a perfect fever of suspense.

The success, so much greater than he had expected, unnerved him.

"Now, George," he said, "you will go—will you not?"

"I think not, guv'nor. While we've got our hands in, we may as well get all that we can."

"But what more is there to take?"

"Do you forget those pearls?" he said, in a whisper.

"Forget them?—no; but I wish you would do so."

"Not a bit of it, guv'nor. I mean to have them. I have set my heart upon it, so it's no good for you to say a word."

"Then I will not accompany you."

"But I say you shall! Come on—you shall hold the light. Why, d—n it, it won't take a minute!"

"But I would rather not, George."

"What is it you are afraid of, guv'nor? You are trembling and shaking there like a leaf."

"I am not afraid."

"But I say you are."

"I tell you again I am not—I am cold."

"Well, you will be warmer presently. Be quick, I

say—I don't intend to stand disputing here. Frightened of a dead body!—the idea is ridiculous! Why, she is but a woman. And supposing she had been alive, what could she have done to us? Just nothing at all. And of course she is more helpless now than ever, being dead."

But Jonathan Wild could not look at the transaction in such a philosophical light as his son did, and he still shrank from entering the chamber of death.

Yet he feared the consequences of flatly and openly refusing compliance with his son's requests.

His hand shook to such a degree that the light of the lantern went dancing all over the walls in a most eccentric manner.

It proved of little service to George, who continued to mutter all kinds of curses in a whisper.

Determined to have the matter over as quickly as possible, he hastened to the bedside.

Then, leaning over it, removed the row of pearls that had been twisted in the hair.

Hurriedly placing them in his pocket, he took hold of the necklace, and tried to unclasp it.

But the spring by which it was secured appeared to be of a very complicated description, and, try as he would, he could not get it undone.

His curses grew louder and deeper.

But yet the necklace was obstinate.

Then, his patience being altogether exhausted, he uttered an oath, and snatched the necklace violently.

Yet it did not break, and he repeated the snatch again and again.

At the third time the thread broke.

But at the same instant a wild and fearful shriek filled the apartment, echoed by a shout from George Wild, for he suddenly felt himself in the grasp of two icy-cold hands.

He was evidently in the grasp of the corpse, and this idea was such a truly horrible one that it caused even George Wild to lose his customary firmness and presence of mind.

He struggled furiously and fiercely to get free from the tenacious grip, but could not.

Trembling, and overcome with horror, Jonathan Wild dropped the lantern and rushed precipitately towards the window.

Such a noise as had now been made could not fail to awaken all the inhabitants of the house, and, accordingly, in a second there was a great tumult, for all were anxious to know what was the matter.

George fought, and struck, and struggled.

But he was deprived of his usual strength, or else he could have flung off such a grasp easily.

It was not for long, however, that he suffered his fears to get the better of him.

Summoning what fortitude he could to his aid, and recovering possession of his scattered faculties, he came at length to the conclusion that the person he had seen was not dead, but only insensible, and the violence he had used had resuscitated her.

This was conclusively proved by the actions of the supposed corpse, and by the continual shrieks that thrilled from her lips.

Still George could not free himself.

The sound of hastily-approaching footsteps and the appearance of flashing lights made him desperate.

Capture he feared was about to follow. The success he had so fondly felicitated himself upon was only the precursor of an utter failure.

With a mighty effort he released one arm, and no sooner did he feel it at liberty than he struck a fierce and random blow.

Another shriek that was pealing forth was cut short.

The grasp upon his other arm relaxed, and immediately after there was the sound of a heavy fall.

No sooner did he find himself free, than, forgetting all about the booty he had obtained with so much difficulty, George rushed to the window, sprang through it, and, reckless of personal consequences, flung himself into the garden.

The house was now in the greatest commotion.

A man carrying a long fowling-piece in his hand rushed into the room just as George quitted it.

He saw him spring over the balcony, and hesitated to follow him.

But, he raised his weapon to his shoulder, and, perceiving

a dark figure on the ground below, he took aim hastily and pulled the trigger.

There was a stunning report, followed by a yell either of fright or agony.

Then the bright flash of the gun disappeared, leaving all objects plunged in deep darkness.

The rushing of footsteps and the rustling of the shrubs in the garden below proclaimed that the shot had not been very effectual.

In fact, George Wild had only been struck very slightly by some of the scattered shots, which were very small in size.

At first, however, he feared he was shot.

But finding the injury he had received was so trifling, he set forward with renewed vigour.

In advance he could hear distinctly the sound of a heavy footstep.

It was Jonathan, and he tried hard to overtake him.

He proved himself the fleetest runner of the two, and just as they reached the boundary of the estate he stood abreast with him.

Looking back, they saw lights moving about in the garden, as though the servants were searching there for them.

CHAPTER DCCVII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON TALK OVER THEIR FUTURE PROCEEDINGS.

"ESCAPED, guv'nor!" said George, in a gasping, breathless voice—"escaped!"

"Yes," said Jonathan, "luckily we have got off all right; but if you had been captured you would have had no one to blame but yourself. You refused to take my advice."

"Well, guv'nor, and what if I did? I think we have managed pretty well after all. We have left the plate behind us, it is true, but yet I don't grieve much about it, for it would have been difficult to carry, and more difficult still to dispose of."

Jonathan was silent, for he knew well enough that this was perfectly true.

"Come on," said George—"don't dally! The sooner we can reach our horses, mount them, and be off, the better it will be for us. Look—those rascals are actually coming this way!"

"Never mind them," said Jonathan. "We shall be able to outrun them easily as soon as we mount."

"We shall. Forward, guv'nor—twenty yards more will take us to the spot."

Twenty yards were soon traversed, and then, to their infinite satisfaction, they found their steeds safe and secure.

To untie them and to spring to the saddles took them only a moment, and then, choosing the best route they could find, they made their way as quickly as possible out into the open country.

They were careful not to emerge on the side of the plantation that faced the mansion they had entered.

While they had all those trees between themselves and their foes, they stood a better chance of making their escape.

George Wild's horse was slightly the best, and therefore he was able to keep the lead.

He directed his course completely at random, his sole intent being to get as far away from that part of the country as he possibly could.

Presently he ventured to decrease his speed, and he called out to Jonathan to do the like.

"There is no occasion to distress our horses now," he said; "we are safe and secure."

"Yes; though the escape we have had is truly marvellous."

"Never mind, guv'nor, so long as it was an escape. I am pleased to think that we have made such a good night's work of it."

"What do you intend to do next, George?"

"I have just been thinking; and it is a point that we had better talk over together. What have you to propose?"

"I am ready to listen to anything you have to say."

"You are very obliging, guv'nor, and I won't keep you in suspense. This money that we've got will, I hope, supply our immediate wants."

"No doubt it will."

"Well, then, you know our great object? It is to obtain possession of the girl. If we can only succeed, we will not let her slip through our fingers as we have done more than once in times gone by."

Jonathan sighed.

"What do you make that noise for, guv'nor?" asked his son.

"Why, I was thinking how strange it was that all the attempts I have made against the happiness of that girl have proved fruitless. Whenever I have captured her she has eluded me; and, in fact, I verily believe that I, and I alone, have been the means of bringing her into possession of her title and estates."

"Of course you have, guv'nor, and she ought to be grateful for it; and if she is not, we will try and make her, that's all, guv'nor!"

"But," said Jonathan, "I am at a loss to know how you are to effect your purpose."

"I don't know myself as yet, but you can tell me where she is most likely to be."

"No—that I can't."

"You speak too hastily, guv'nor. Think again for a moment or two. I am certain that you will recollect."

"Recollect what?"

"Why, some of your former cunning and skill. Have they quite deserted you?"

"I think so."

"And d—n me if I don't think the same! But you can answer me this question: Where was the late Lord Donnull in the habit of residing?"

"At his mansion in Oxfordshire."

"Do you know the situation of it?"

"Yes—quite well."

"Perhaps," said George, gleefully, "you have often been there?"

"I have."

"Into the house?"

"Yes—over almost every part of it."

"Well, then, if that's the case," said George, "what we have to do is as easy as easy can be."

"But how do you know the girl is there?"

"I don't know it, guv'nor; I only go by probabilities. Most likely she is there."

"Yes—I think so too."

"Well, then, guv'nor, turn your horse's head in that direction, and I will follow you. Ride as straight to it as you possibly can. Don't be afraid to get there too soon."

"Is it likely that I should have any such fear? But it seems to me, George, there is one thing you have forgotten."

"What's that?"

"Why, should we succeed——"

"Say when we have succeeded, guv'nor, and I will listen to what you have to say next."

"Well, then, when we have succeeded, what are we to do with the girl?—where are we to keep her?"

"That's well thought of, guv'nor—very well thought of. I confess it had quite escaped my notice."

"Yes, it is something that must be decided upon beforehand."

"Exactly. Can you give a suggestion?"

"Perhaps I could. Can you?"

"Not as yet."

"I confess the best way will be for us to think that point over as we ride along."

"With all my heart."

George Wild was by no means pleased at finding Jonathan in such a mood as he was at present, and he wondered what he could do to rouse him out of it.

He knew that it was only a temporary depression of the spirits, and that if he could only strike upon the right note an immediate alteration would be made.

Remembering what influence he had formerly obtained over him by merely pronouncing one word, he resolved to try the effect of pronouncing that word again.

"Guv'nor," he said, after a short pause.

"Well, what now?" was the gloomy, sullen answer.

"Why, you have been reminding me of something I have forgotten, and now it is my turn to remind you."

"Of what?"

"I say you quite forget, and, not to keep you in suspense, I will just say that you have told me more than

once that there is only one thing that you live for, and that one thing is revenge."

Jonathan was silent.

"Do you hear what I say?" continued George. "Have you agreed to forego your intention? Have you altered your mind? Do you intend to allow your foes to obtain the complete mastery over you without some demonstration being made by you?"

"No," said Jonathan. "I have not forgotten, nor have I any such intention."

"Well, then, rouse yourself—summon up all your energies, and by one bold stroke, place yourself in the position I propose."

Jonathan slowly shook his head.

"My many failures, and especially those that I have had lately, greatly dishearten me; in fact, I cannot by any means keep up my courage."

"Bah! You must! We shall soon be in better feather."

"I wish I could make sure of it."

"I am sure of it," said George.

"But I am not," returned Jonathan. "Yet——"

"Yet what?"

"If I could only once be aware that this girl who has given us so much trouble was once more in our power, my drooping spirits would revive. I should feel then I had the strength to do battle with my enemies. I would then do something that would make them remember there was such a man as Jonathan Wild in existence—something that would appease the intense longing for vengeance that I have felt so long!"

"Now you speak better, guv'nor," said George. "You are coming gradually to your senses. Don't feel afraid about the success of our plan. I feel quite confident in it."

"Do you indeed, George, honestly and truly, or are you saying it?"

"I do believe it, of course, for it seems to me nothing can be more simple. You know the situation of the place—are acquainted, in fact, with all its intricacies."

"Yes, yes—that's right!"

"Well, then, what so easy as for us, after we have arranged some place where we can keep her—you understand?"

"Yes, yes."

"What so easy as for us to take up our station somewhere near the mansion, and watch patiently for her to come forth alone? Whenever she does this—and you may depend that she will do it sooner or later—we will follow stealthily and silently in her steps, then seize her, and secure her before she can utter a sound that will give an alarm."

"Now you put it in that light, George," returned Jonathan, "it does indeed seem easy, and, in spite of all the past, I begin to feel renewed hope."

"Of course you do, guv'nor! It will not be long before her friends discover not only her loss, but that you had a hand in carrying her off. Then will be your time to make whatever terms you may think fit. You will have all of them in your power, and you can do what you like to glut your revenge."

Whether George was sincere or not in this is difficult to say; but his words produced upon Jonathan the effect he fully calculated and intended they should.

He waved his arms fiercely in the air, and muttered words escaped his lips.

Beyond all question, it was gratifying in the highest degree to him to be able to indulge then, with anticipation, in the prospect of obtaining a full and deadly vengeance upon all those he pleased to call his foes; and these, as the reader knows well, were those persons who had refused to permit him to do just exactly as he liked in the days when he wielded so much power.

George watched him with silent satisfaction.

Perhaps, ere long, we may be able to fathom the depths of his mind and understand what were the motives that actuated him.

For the present, however, we can only continue to describe what he did.

His end was best served, however, by keeping up in Jonathan's breast a spurious kind of courage—just enough, in fact, to enable him to be of use and service in any nefarious scheme that he might plan, and which required the aid of some one else besides himself to carry into due execution.

"Are you thinking over what I have said, guv'nor?" he asked, after a long silence. "I know well that it will bear thinking about, and the more you turn all things over in your mind, the more convinced you will be that if we're only moderately careful it will be impossible for us to fail in what we have agreed to do."

"You are right, George; and I promise you now that I will do the best in my power to second you in this enterprise. But if it fails?"

"Don't trouble yourself with that contingency," said George, hastily.

"But if it fails," added Jonathan, "I shall no longer have the heart or courage to try anything, no matter how bright and hopeful it may seem."

CHAPTER DCCVIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON FEEL MORE AND MORE CONFIDENT AS TO THE RESULT OF THEIR DARING SCHEME.

"Do your best this time, guv'nor," replied George, "and I will answer for the result; don't let the idea of failure ever occur to your imagination."

"I will not."

"That's well said; and now tell me how far you think it may be from this place in Oxfordshire that you mention."

"Very many miles."

"How many?"

"I could not possibly pretend to tell you. I can only say that it is a long and weary journey that we have before us."

"Never mind that, guv'nor. Our horses are good, and will travel it easily; moreover, we have money to defray all expenses, and if we can only avoid the police officers, why then all will be well."

"So it will," said Jonathan, "and I sometimes think——"

"Think what?"

"That if I could only obtain a rest for a short time—not very long, but yet for a time—that I should regain my former energy."

"I should not wonder, guv'nor; but you must not talk of resting now. Wait until we can begin to watch; then you can rest as much as you like!"

Every moment that elapsed seemed to have the effect of reviving Jonathan's energies, and he no longer spoke in the depressed, languid manner that he had hitherto done.

Looking forward into the future, he began to see what a many chances of success George's plan displayed.

Surely the abduction of Edgworth Bess could not be such a difficult matter if they were only careful to make their arrangements properly.

When once they had got her in their power, he knew what a tremendous advantage they would gain.

If they let her go again, it would be wholly and entirely their own fault—they would have no one to blame but themselves.

In fact, if Edgworth Bess was again so unfortunate as to fall into their clutches, her case would be pitiable indeed.

There was every probability of success, and the more the subject was pondered over by Jonathan, the more he was forced to this conclusion, and his spirits rose accordingly.

Next morning, just before daybreak, they stopped at a lonely roadside inn, the inhabitants of which were glad enough to hail two travellers, for it was seldom that people passed that way.

George began by making liberal promises of payment, so that the best the inn could afford was quickly placed before them.

"Now, landlord," he said, "we don't want to be disturbed; just let us alone until we choose to call for you, and you will find that you will be a considerable gainer."

Of course the landlord promised, and the two villains were left to themselves.

Although apparently in a position of so much safety, they adopted their usual precaution of sleeping and watching by turns.

Before either of them could close their eyes, however,



[GEORGE WILD BREAKS OPEN THE CASKET.]

they were obliged to look over the booty they had obtained.

Accordingly the door was firmly secured to guard against any sudden intrusion, and then, one by one, the different objects were examined.

The leather bag was filled as full as it could possibly hold of guineas.

These were indeed most welcome, and better suited to their wants than anything else could have been.

With respect to the casket, however, they were much disappointed.

They reserved that for the last, imagining that it would prove the greatest prize.

The lock for a time baffled their attempts to open it, and George, having but little patience, took up the poker, and, with one well-directed blow, demolished the lid.

It was then discovered that only a few papers—letters, No. 150.—BLUESKIN.

apparently, and turned quite yellow with age—were contained in it.

They were tossed out, with many impatient gesticulations.

They came also across a small miniature portrait.

It was that of a young man dressed in the uniform of a British officer.

Not upon this account, however, did it attract the attention of Wild and his son.

They observed that the case was thickly set with diamonds and other precious stones.

These were worth preserving.

But the portrait itself they broke, and threw the fragments into the fire.

The same fate befel the letters and one or two other trinkets, doubtless relics of some dear departed friend or some lost love.

"In order to hide all traces of this," said George, "we had better break up the casket and burn it also."

Accordingly this was done, and then both feeling highly satisfied with the result of their night's work, and with the prospect they had before them, they drew lots as to who should sleep first.

The chance fell upon Jonathan, who was so excited by these varied events that had occurred that he quite forgot all his dread of slumber.

The fact was, his body was weary and his eyes heavy with want of sleep, and he no sooner laid himself down than he was sound asleep.

George watched patiently and well.

This was from the caution of the man's disposition.

Nothing, however, occurred to disturb them.

As usual, when nature had recovered herself, Jonathan began to be assailed by frightful dreams.

George knew the symptoms, and did not hesitate to wake him up at once.

Besides, his own eyes ached fearfully with watching.

Jonathan professed to be deeply thankful for having his rest broken.

After giving him very particular instructions not to fall asleep, George laid himself down on the rude settle which they had made do duty for a bed.

By dusk they were again in readiness for the road.

They paid the landlord so liberally that that individual jumped immediately to the very erroneous conclusion that two princes at the least had chosen to pass a few hours at his house.

He certainly did his best to please them and give satisfaction, for the horses were in capital condition.

"Now, guv'nor," said George, "we have one object before us, and let us keep it in view, and no other."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you know what our intention is, and you know as well that we are now possessed of the means of carrying it out."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, then, don't let us attempt to engage in any adventure of any description, or be called off by any prospect of gain from what we are about."

"I agree to that with all my heart."

"I am glad you can see the policy and advisability of so doing."

"We seem to have got quite out of the way of the police. They must be searching for us in some other quarter, and I trust the same good luck will attend us all the way."

"So do I. But how near to London shall you have to go, guv'nor, in order to reach this place?"

"Why, not near it at all. It would be altogether out of the way to approach within thirty miles of it."

"So much the better, then. Rely upon it, the further we keep away the better."

"And," said Jonathan, "if we can make a good journey to-night, I should think one more night will almost bring us there."

"That's good news again, guv'nor. Our horses seem inclined to carry us well."

In this kind of conversation Jonathan and his son whiled away the tedium of their journey.

They were able to converse readily enough, for, in order to make their horses hold out, they went no faster than a trot.

The advantage of this was, that, although they did not appear to be going at any wonderful speed, yet it was continuous, and as the horses could keep up without resting for several hours at a stretch, they got over a much larger space of ground than they could have done had they put them to the gallop.

The whole of the night passed without one single adventure.

There was no incident that deserves to be placed upon record.

Once or twice they were met by people who they fancied looked suspiciously and doubtfully upon them.

But, after all, that might have been only their imagination.

On the next night they continued their journey as before, and this time without the occurrence of any incident except that they believed they saw at a distance some signs of the presence of a body of police officers.

If so, however, they were successful in avoiding them,

and towards daybreak Jonathan declared that they must be within fifteen miles of their destination.

"Well, then, guv'nor," said George, as soon as this announcement was made to him, "it is pretty certain that we must be more than usually careful where we take up our quarters."

"Yes, there can be no doubt about that. I was just considering the point when you spoke."

"And I fancy, too," continued George, "that we are near enough to the place we are going to to look out for a permanent hiding-place. Do you know of anything that would suit?"

"I don't; but we must search around us to-morrow night."

"But where shall we pass the day?—that is the question."

"I don't know," was the reply. "To put up at an inn so near would be dangerous."

"Yes, the risk is too great to be thought of."

"Where else are we to go then?"

"Why, until some better place of shelter offers, I should recommend that we take up our quarters in a wood—there seem to be several about."

"Yes, I know of one," returned Jonathan, "that's of considerable extent, and in which we could conceal ourselves for almost any length of time."

"That's the place, then, guv'nor—lead us to it, and mind that you arrive before daylight; we will then consider our future proceedings."

"That's the way, then," said Jonathan, "and yonder is the wood."

He pointed across the country as he spoke, and by the aid of the moon George perceived, at no great distance off, a huge black mass of something that he could readily conceive was a wood.

Jonathan seemed perfectly familiar with his route, and therefore George followed him with the greatest confidence.

The road was rough and full of hollows, and they had to trust in a chief degree to the sagacity of their horses to keep them clear of these obstacles.

At length, however, the wood was gained in safety.

"Hurrah, guv'nor!" said George, as he plunged at once among the trees. "I feel now more assured of our success than ever; and if we can only find some place that will serve not only for us to hide but for us to keep our prisoner in, why then all will be as well as we could possibly wish. Success will be certain."

"I hope so," said Jonathan, "though where the kind of place we require is to be found, I confess I have not the remotest idea."

CHAPTER DCCIX.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON SUDDENLY FIND THEMSELVES IN UNEXPECTED QUARTERS.

"Some place must be found," said George, "though, to be sure, there's plenty of time. At present, the first thing we have to do is to make up our minds in what part of this wood we shall pass the day."

"Certainly."

"I think we shall have to dismount."

"Yes. The trees grow very thickly together, and the branches are low down to the ground, and even on foot you will find that we shall have some difficulty in forcing a passage."

These words were soon after verified.

Their clothes were torn and their flesh scratched by the brambles and other prickly shrubs that were growing on all sides.

But such trivial inconveniences as these were not heeded by Wild and his son.

The wood was situated upon the side of a hill, and rose up somewhat abruptly.

In places the ascent would be very steep, but in others comparatively easy.

Yet the whole journey was terribly fatiguing, and at length George said:

"Don't you think we have come far enough, guv'nor? Curse me—I am tired of this work!"

"A little further," was the reply. "Wait until we come to the next open space, and there we will stay."

To this George yielded a grumbling assent, and once more they continued to push through the trees.

Some time elapsed before a suitable spot was found.

At last, however, with great satisfaction, they halted in a little clearing about thirty yards in diameter at its widest part.

"This will do capitally," said George, "and thankful I am that we have at last pushed our way through those confounded trees. I hope we shall be able to find an easier way out again."

"Very likely we shall. But come, let us dismount and light a fire. We may as well make ourselves comfortable as not."

"But supposing the smoke should be seen?"

"It would only be attributed to gipsies," was the reply, and Jonathan stopped abruptly in what he was saying, and George uttered at the same time a loud cry of alarm.

A shrill whistle had sounded in their ears, and then immediately there dashed into the clearing some eight or ten ferocious-looking men.

At first, Wild and his son believed they were about to be attacked by police officers.

When they saw who their assailants really were, they felt considerably reassured.

These men were roughly and rudely apparelled, and presented altogether a truly hangdog appearance.

Their clothes were formed of the most heterogeneous materials, and were torn and worn in many places.

"Down with them!" they cried, rushing forward—"down with them! Have no mercy—no quarter!"

Luckily, Jonathan and his son had not alighted from their steeds, so they possessed a certain kind of advantage over their adversaries.

But the odds of two to ten or a dozen was truly fearful to think of. There could be only one result to such an unequal contest.

Jonathan Wild, however, displayed on the present occasion a good deal of his former presence of mind.

He raised his voice to a loud pitch, and cried:

"Hold—hold! Do not attack us, for you are interfering with your best friends. Attend to our wishes, and you shall have whatever reward you think proper to name!"

Such a magnificent offer as this was quite enough to take such miserable, wobegone wretches by surprise, and therefore they one and all ceased in their attack.

"I will soon explain myself," cried Jonathan, finding the point he had gained. "But you must have some kind of a leader or captain among you. Let him step forward, and I will say more."

The men drew close together, and a whispered discussion took place between them.

It was followed by one of their number striding forward from the rest.

"You are the captain, then?" said Wild, eyeing him closely.

"I am," was the reply. "And now tell us how it is that you make yourselves out to be our friends. We are willing to listen to what you have to say, because we can make sure of your lives at any moment."

"You will find it to your advantage to hear us out patiently," said Jonathan. "We have come here to carry out a particular intention, which, nevertheless, does not concern you in the least; but if you like to aid us, there's a chance of earning more money than perhaps you will ever see again in the whole course of your lives!"

"Money is what we want," said the man. "Just show us a reasonable way of getting it, and we shall be content."

"It is a reasonable way," said Jonathan. "And now put down your arms all of you, and give me a proof that you mean well by us. On our part, we will give you an earnest of our liberality."

Jonathan made a sign to his son that he was not slow to understand.

He produced from his pocket the large bag of guineas, and, thrusting his hand into it, seized as many as he could grasp, and flung them towards the throng of men.

An immediate scramble ensued, and it was most ludicrous to observe how quickly the money was picked up.

It seemed scarcely to touch the ground.

"There," said Jonathan—"that's a trifle, and you can have more—as I said at first—if you choose to aid us!"

The captain's eyes sparkled when he saw the large bag of gold that George drew forth.

It effected a total change in his manner and behaviour.

From being defiant and insolent, he became cringing and obsequious in a moment.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said, touching his hat; "if I had known, you should not have had such a rough reception. However, as there is no harm done, perhaps it does not matter?"

"Not in the least," said Jonathan, in an offhand manner—"not in the least."

"Very well, then, from this moment you may count me and all my followers as your humble servants to command. Whatever you set us to do we will do faithfully and well."

"I will take you at your word," said Jonathan. "I want you to do no more at present than to show us to the place where you generally take up your quarters. You must have some lurking-place, I am convinced!"

"We have," was the reply, given with some slight degree of hesitation. "But if we show it to you, what guarantee have we that you will not betray us?"

"The best possible guarantee," replied Wild. "We shall pay you so well for what you do that you will have no occasion to make use of hiding-places in future."

"You promise well," said the captain, as he styled himself.

"And," said George, joining in the conversation, "you will find our performance of them as satisfactory as you can wish."

"Such being the case, then, follow me."

The captain—for so we may as well continue to call him, as we know no other name—turned round and beckoned to Jonathan and his son to follow in his footsteps.

They obeyed without the slightest hesitation.

They did not fear to go.

Near the edge of the enclosure, just where the ground began to rise abruptly, one of the men, at a sign from the captain, stooped down and seized hold of what appeared to be a long tuft of reeds and grass.

This he pulled energetically, and, to the astonishment of Jonathan Wild and George, a small opening in the earth, about large enough to admit a man's body, was disclosed.

"This is the way to our cave," said the captain. "I will go first, and you will follow next."

"And our horses," said Jonathan—"what will you do with them?"

"Leave them with one of the men. They will be perfectly safe, and well taken care of."

"Enough!" was the reply.

The captain lowered himself through the hole, and then disappeared.

Jonathan followed, and George after him.

Then came the other men, with the exception of two, who remained to take charge of the horses.

Jonathan found himself in a rudely-arched passage burrowed, to all appearance, out of the solid earth.

It wound about in a very tortuous fashion.

The darkness was profound, but the captain told them to walk on without fear, assuring them that there were no obstacles in their path.

Suddenly the whole party emerged into a cavern so vast and spacious that it was impossible to take in the whole dimensions of it at once.

It was lighted and warmed at the same time by a very large wood fire that was burning in the centre of it.

The blaze leaped up many feet into the air, and shed a ruddy and picturesque light upon all around.

In this cavern were several other men, who started upon seeing a couple of strangers.

But they were reassured immediately by their captain.

Soon afterwards the two men also came in who had had charge of the horses.

But they entered from the opposite end.

"There are more ways than one either in or out of this cavern," said the captain, in explanation. "It's a rather odd place, is it not?"

"It is indeed!" returned Wild. "I should never have thought of finding anything like it."

"I daresay not. But you see, the hill upon which the forest grows is almost hollow—it is literally filled with

caverns, but this is the largest and the best of them all."

Wild and his son found much to admire in this singular place, and stood for a length of time gazing about them in astonishment.

At last, turning to the captain, they said:

"We are hungry, and require first a good meal. Don't spare your trouble or anything you have, for rest assured that we will pay well for all."

"We will not," said the captain. "You may depend upon our fidelity and willingness to serve you."

With these words he moved away, and George soon after touched Jonathan on the sleeve.

"Hush!" he said. "Don't speak on any account above a whisper, or seem surprised at what I am going to say!"

Jonathan only replied by a glance.

"Do you see how the captain is whispering and making signs to his men?" continued George, under his breath.

"I do!"

"Well, then, just beware! They may mean to act fairly by us, and it may be that my suspicions are unjust. However, no harm can result from keeping a close watch upon them."

"That's true enough," said Jonathan. "But what do you fear?"

"No more than I have said. I think, by all this hospitality, they are only acting a part—I don't believe they are sincere. It may be that they have trapped us into this place in order to obtain from us what money we have—that would be the easiest way of settling our business."

Jonathan was obliged to confess that this was correct, and the more he watched the captain and his men the more suspicious he grew.

They kept at some distance, and at one end of the cavern, whispering to each other, and apparently some most important subject was under discussion.

CHAPTER DCCX.

IN WHICH JONATHAN AND WILD JUNIOR HAVE A VERY NARROW ESCAPE OF THEIR LIVES.

THIS continued until the meal they were preparing was ready.

It was altogether a very rude repast, but yet to hungry men it was tempting enough.

A table was formed by placing three planks upon some blocks of wood that had been sawn from the trunks of some of the trees in the wood above.

Such blocks as these were used for seats.

"Eat," said the captain—"you are welcome to all we have. And what would you like to drink?"

"Brandy," said Jonathan—"have you brandy?"

The captain smiled significantly.

"The best there is in all England," he said. "I'll warrant there's none to equal it! I will go and fetch some. In the meantime, begin."

The captain moved off, and was absent for a considerable time.

But at last he returned, bringing with him several bottles that might be supposed to contain brandy.

"There," he said—"there they are. You can have one apiece, and I will have one, and here's one that can be shared among the rest."

The bottles were placed upon the table, and some drinking-cups beside them.

"Never mind drawing the corks," cried the captain. "Follow my example—it will save both time and trouble." He took hold of one of the bottles as he spoke, and knocked the neck sharply against the edge of the table.

The glass broke at once, and a small portion of the spirit was spilt.

Jonathan and George both did the same, and so did the man who sat next to them.

"Fill up," said the captain—"fill up, and——"

He stopped, and, in a different tone of voice, ejaculated:

"What's that?"

The others turned round immediately.

This was an opportunity that George Wild had been hoping for, and yet fearing he should not gain.

He saw instantly that the attention of everyone was directed to another part of the cavern, and he took advantage of the fact to change his bottle for the one that was next to him.

Jonathan saw what he did.

His suspicions had been growing in strength.

Of course he was at no loss to comprehend his son's meaning, and, with exceeding dexterity, he followed his example.

The object that had so opportunely attracted the attention of the captain and his band was a man, who walked into the cave with the air of one who was thoroughly familiar with the place he was in.

He was recognised in a moment, and the captain sat down.

It was a critical moment, for Jonathan and George could not tell whether what they had done would be noticed.

Luckily, the alteration was passed over.

"I have returned sooner than you expected," exclaimed the new-comer; "but I can give you my reasons——"

"Hold!" said the captain, interrupting him, "we will talk about that another time. You see we have two visitors in the old cave."

The one who had just arrived looked with the greatest astonishment at the persons indicated.

"It's all right," said the captain. "They want us to do a little job for them, and are going to pay us for it like princes."

The other said nothing, but sat down close to the captain.

"Now," said that individual, rising to his feet, "fill up a bumper all of you, and I will give you a toast!"

He was obeyed instantly, and with great alacrity.

"Here's a long life and success to all of us, and may we earn the reward that has been promised us, and may it be larger than we expect!"

The glasses were drained.

But George took care to keep an eye upon all that was going on while he was drinking.

He observed that the man and the captain exchanged significant glances with each other.

He felt then that his surmise was correct—that the brandy had been drugged.

The whole motive of the men's conduct was now plainly enough displayed to him.

They had seen his money, and had resolved to adopt the easiest means of obtaining it.

This was to lure them into the cavern, and then render them insensible with brandy.

After that, it would be the easiest thing in the world to put them to death, to rifle their bodies of all the valuables they possessed, and dig a hole for them in one corner of the cave.

They would reckon that by adopting this course they would be sure to gain more than if they trusted to the fair promises that had been made to them.

Moreover, they would feel quite sure that the secret of the cave could not possibly be divulged.

The brandy must have been skilfully drugged, for neither the captain nor his men noticed any peculiarity in it, as George fully expected them to do.

Having obtained the bottle the captain intended for his own use, Jonathan drank deeply of its contents.

He was not alarmed for the results.

George watched the brandy disappear; but he knew well enough that Jonathan could take an immense quantity of the fiery beverage without the least appearance of intoxication.

But he noticed that the captain, and his men as well, seemed exceedingly pleased at every glass that was swallowed.

For his own part, he fought shy of the brandy altogether.

He was not accustomed to drink it in such huge draughts as his father.

Moreover, he felt that, let the stuff be what it might, he was better without it.

This was noticed, and the captain said, with some anxiety:

"You shirk your glass. Why do you do that? Is not the brandy good?"

"First rate," said George; "but I am not much of a tippler. However, it is really so good that I shall have one glass more! Here's to the health of you all!"

He drained the glass to the last drop. The captain now felt that he had his prey pretty secure.

"Well, now," he cried, "as we are all here together comfortable, just let us know the nature of the service you require us to perform?"

"All in good time—all in good time! We will let you know that, and the amount of the reward as well."

"Oh yes!" said the captain, with a silly, half-vacant laugh—"the amount of the reward, of course! Aha! now I call that a good joke!"

"What?"

"Nothing—oh, nothing! But what's this? I—Confound it, what's it mean?"

He rubbed his eyes and his head vigorously.

The fumes of the drugged brandy were mounting to his brain.

He could not make it out at all.

The effects of the drug, though slow to come, were very rapid when they once displayed themselves.

A kind of mist floated before him, and far away in the distance he fancied he could see his two strange visitors sitting calm and composed.

"What's this?" he cried again, making an effort to speak in a loud voice, but failing in the attempt—"what's this?"

The question was little more than an inarticulate murmur.

But he rose to his feet, and made several frantic efforts to stand still.

It was in vain.

He sank down again upon his seat.

The same effects were visible upon all the rest, though some of the men had only drunk sparingly of the brandy.

They had taken the alarm from their captain's manner.

George sprang rapidly on to the table, and called out to Jonathan to follow him.

"Draw your sword!" he said. "Place yourself back to back to me, and cut them down without mercy if they attack us!"

The men were alarmed at this sudden movement.

They tried to produce the various weapons they carried.

But their arms had lost all use and power.

Their limbs seemed suddenly smitten with paralysis.

"Keep them at bay," said George, "and we shall be saved the trouble of killing them, for beyond a doubt the drug was a poisonous one."

His words were soon verified.

Several of the men, the captain included, after trying to steady themselves upon their feet, fell down, and lay as helpless as logs round the table.

Then others pressed forward with the intention of attacking the two strangers.

But the effects of the drug overpowered them, and they sank back.

Then others endeavoured to make their escape from the cavern.

But before they could reach its place of exit they dropped down upon the ground like poisoned rats.

In less than ten minutes afterwards there was not one of them that showed even the least symptoms of animation.

"We've tumbled in for a good thing, guv'nor," said George, in his usual careless tones.

Jonathan shuddered.

He could not treat the frightfully narrow escape they had had so lightly.

"We might have been worse off," continued George, as he jumped off the table. "Come, guv'nor, don't be scared—let us make the most of this strange adventure!"

"Strange truly!" replied Jonathan. "I confess that I am scarcely able to comprehend it yet."

"Oh! the whole thing is simple enough," said George, "as you will find as soon as ever you begin to reflect."

"But horrible!" said Jonathan. "But for you I should have drunk enough of the poison to kill fifty men."

"Very likely you would. But perhaps your suspicions would have been aroused as mine were; I thought their behaviour strange from the very first."

"Well, they are justly punished for their treachery."

"Yes, and, what's better, we've got this place all to our-

selves, guv'nor, and what better place do you think we could wish for?"

"What, to take up our quarters in?"

"Yes. Didn't the captain tell us that all under this hill was burrowed with caverns? Why, we might bid defiance to detection here for any length of time, and keep our prisoner perfectly secure."

"That's true enough," said Jonathan, "though I should prefer some other cave to this, if we could find it."

"So should I."

"And our horses—I wonder what they have done with them?"

"They are safe enough above, no doubt," was the reply.

"But before we do anything more we must ascertain whether these fellows are really insensible or dead."

"It will be hard to tell that."

"Perhaps it will; so the safest plan will be to bind them all. Then, if they wake up, they will not be able to do us any damage."

"But the necessary material?" said Jonathan—"where are we to find that?"

"Let us look around," was the reply. "Depend upon it such fellows as these have all things of the kind ready to hand. We shall find rope enough, never fear!"

These words were true enough, for in one corner they found several coils of strong rope.

With these they bound the insensible men in such a manner that, if they recovered their consciousness, they would be utterly unable to make any aggressive movement.

This work occupied a considerable time.

But it was performed with very great cheerfulness.

"Now, then, guv'nor," said George, "I think we may make so bold as to say that we are perfectly secure. And now to carry out our little plan of operations."

CHAPTER DCCXI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD CONTINUE THEIR SEARCH AFTER JONATHAN WILD WITH UNREMITTING DILIGENCE.

ONCE more we return to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, who were continuing their pursuit of Jonathan Wild in a manner as energetic as it was systematic.

It will be remembered that they contrived to pass the police officers on the road, and pushed on as fast as their horses would take them.

They were anxious to get as much in advance of the police officers as they could, so that they should be free to act independently of them.

After what had occurred, they felt very little inclination to place the least dependence upon their skill in either taking Jonathan prisoner or keeping him secure when they had taken him.

This duty, then, they resolved at all risks to assume.

Certainly if once they were so fortunate as to come up with Jonathan Wild, no skill or adroitness on his part would ever get him out of their clutches.

It would be in vain for him to attempt to make any escape.

They would not rest until they had seen him safely lodged in Newgate.

What they had heard filled them with hope.

Surely the moment was close at hand when they would be able to seize him?

Still, as we know, they were very much behind Jonathan in reality, for the movements of that individual had lately been very uncertain.

But they were able to trace him with tolerable accuracy as far as the farm-house, when, to their surprise, they learned by accident that he had positively returned to London.

This was most unfortunate and vexatious.

They understood clearly enough how they had missed him on the way, yet, far from allowing this failure to daunt them, they retraced their steps with a stronger determination in their minds than they had hitherto felt.

This journey up to London was not marked by any particular events.

At various by-places they heard intelligence of the man they sought, and it was perfectly clear that George Wild was in his company.

But at this time, while Jack and Blueskin were journeying back to London, Jonathan was actually on his way to

the cavern in which, as we have seen, he had such strange adventures.

Therefore, upon reaching London, there was only another disappointment in store for the two friends.

With great difficulty, and only by the practice of the greatest ingenuity, they discovered that Jonathan had left, taking, as near as could be learned, the very same route as before.

This mystified them not a little.

They could not comprehend the meaning of such extraordinary conduct.

Could they but have known a little about the Jacobite conspiracy, everything would have been clear and plain enough.

When they learned that those they sought had missed them by little more than a hair's-breadth, they again prepared to continue their pursuit.

But this incessant labour told severely upon both of them.

They were so jaded and wearied with travelling so many miles without rest that they were scarcely able to sit in their saddles.

But they knew every moment they lost was of the greatest value.

Soon after they set out again they were overtaken by a violent and tremendous storm, that made it a matter of imperative necessity that they should seek shelter in some place or other.

Jack was unwilling at first, great as his fatigue was.

But the tempest increased to such a terrific pitch that it was no longer possible to remain under the open sky.

They were scarcely clear of London, and just at this time they entered one of its straggling suburbs.

Not a soul was to be seen in any of the streets.

But from the windows of one house there came bright and ruddy beams of light.

"There's an inn," said Blueskin. "Come, Jack, we must shelter there until this storm is past. To continue our journey would be impossible."

Blueskin turned down the entrance to the stables as he spoke, and Jack followed him.

The ostler protected himself by throwing a sack over his shoulders, and came out to take charge of the horses.

"See to them well," said Blueskin, as he dismounted.

"All right, gentlemen—you leave them to me."

"Come on," said Blueskin; "the sooner we get under cover the better."

They ran across to the inn as he spoke, and, pushing open the door, entered.

They found themselves at once in a kind of tap-room or kitchen, in which a great number of persons were seated.

They were people of almost all grades and of all kinds of appearances, and had been driven to take shelter by the storm.

Never before, probably, had the inn contained so many visitors at one time.

The kitchen in which they sat was cheerful enough, and formed a very delightful contrast to the storm that was raging so violently without, and threatening every moment to shake the inn to its foundations.

Among so many, two more were scarcely likely to be noticed, and, instead of pushing forward to the fire as most did, our two friends contented themselves with an obscure corner, where they would be less likely to be noticed.

Ale was brought to them, and they sat listening to whatever was going on, for on more than one occasion they had acquired valuable information in this chance and unexpected manner.

But the chief topic was the storm, which was one of so violent a character as to have no parallel in the memory of those who were then present.

Presently, however, the door was opened, and a miserable, half-starved-looking object, drenched to the skin, made his appearance.

His clothes were rusty-black, and worn quite threadbare, though, as they had been well wetted by the rain, they presented a glossier appearance than they did usually.

The same might be said of his hat.

So thin was this man—so wretched and so poverty-stricken in his whole appearance—that he immediately attracted the attention of all the persons in the room.

"I humbly beg your pardons, all of you," he said, in a shrill, piping voice, "but this storm was so dreadful that I was obliged to come in. Don't turn me out, Mr. Landlord—pray don't!"

"I am not likely to do that," was the bluff reply.

"Oh, I don't know," continued the old man—"I am often turned out because I have no money. Now to-night I have not a halfpenny, so that if you allow me to remain here out of reach of the storm, and where I can see the fire, it will be from charity only."

"Well, I am not a man to refuse such charity as that," said the landlord, "and, what's more, you can have a cup of ale to warm yourself with—you look as if you were frozen to the bone."

"I am—I am," was the shivering reply. "I was caught some distance off, and even when I reached this house I hesitated a long while before I ventured to come in, for fear that I should be driven out again."

"But what are you?" said the landlord, giving him the cup of ale he had promised. "You say you are very poor, yet you don't look like a beggar."

A faint flush of colour rose up into the countenance of the old man as he replied:

"No, I am no beggar—I have never begged anything but such a favour as I have asked you in all my life."

"And yet so poor?"

"Yes, very poor; I have been unfortunate."

By common consent, all the people in the room ceased talking, in order to listen to this little dialogue between the landlord and the old man.

Simple as it seemed, yet, from the appearance of the parties, they were strangely and powerfully interested in it.

"But, come," said the landlord, "you have not told us what you are—surely you must have some profession or avocation?"

The flush of colour upon the old man's countenance deepened as he replied:

"Yes, yes—it is true enough, I have a profession, but it is a poor one—a miserable one. I wish I had chosen some other."

"But what are you?" cried the landlord, growing impatient that his question should not be replied to.

"An author," said the old man, timidly.

"An author?" repeated the landlord.

"Yes; do you not understand what I mean by that?"

"Yes, you mean you write things."

"You are perfectly correct."

"I know you are always poor," said the landlord. "I have met with folks like you before to-night. Now what do you write?"

"Anything," was the reply—"anything that you like to mention. I can sing a song too, though my voice is not so good as it used to be, still I can sing, and I will make one up as I go along if you like, and bring in all that is taking place around us."

"Can you do that?" said the landlord.

"Yes, I can."

"Well then, let's hear you."

A loud knocking upon the tables by way of applause followed this proposition.

The old man's eyes brightened a little.

"Perhaps," he said, hesitatingly—"perhaps, good people all, if I amuse you by what I do you won't mind giving me a trifle for what I do?"

"No—no, certainly not," said the landlord. "I will go round to all, and we will raise a subscription for you."

This was a tempting offer to the old man, and for a moment or two he was quite overcome by it.

Then, in his peculiar, thin, shrill voice, he commenced a kind of doggerel song, bringing in with considerable address his own poverty and wretchedness, the storm, the generosity of the landlord, and the kindness of his auditors.

Of the poem or song in a literary point of view but little in the way of admiration can be said, but yet, as he praised everybody from landlord downwards, it was universally appreciated and applauded.

"Capital," said the landlord, when he had finished. "Now then, I will go round and see what I can get."

All gave something—some little, some much, but in the aggregate there was a goodly sum.

The poor author was profuse in his acknowledgments.

"Let us have another song," said some one, "and we

will pass the hat round again—this will be a good night's work for you, old fellow."

"I can't sing you another song, I am afraid," returned the old man—"I am getting too old and too weak to sing; it tries my voice too much; but I have something here which perhaps will amuse you quite as well—perhaps better."

Great curiosity was immediately manifest to know what this something was.

Slowly and carefully the old man unbuttoned his coat, and from one of his pockets produced a small roll of paper.

This he opened carefully and gently, and smoothed out with his hands.

It could then be seen that the roll was composed of several sheets of paper covered all over with very close writing.

"Now then, old boy," said the landlord, slapping him playfully on the back, "what have you got there? let us know what it is?"

CHAPTER DCCXII.

IN WHICH THE POOR AUTHOR READS HIS TALE.

"It is a little tale," was the reply, "founded on something that actually occurred. It's the last thing I have written, and I am in hopes that before long I shall be able to find a purchaser for it. I was on my way to London when the storm broke out."

"And you thought about reading it to us?" said the landlord.

"Yes," was the reply, "I think it will interest you, and serve to pass a few minutes away. It will not take me long to read it—not long enough to tire you by listening, I feel assured."

"Well," said the landlord, glancing around him, "what says the company—are you willing to hear this tale read instead of having another song?"

A unanimous "Yes, yes" came from all sides, followed by some applause that so excited the old man and made his hand tremble to such a degree that he could not hold his papers still enough to read them.

At last, amid a profound silence, he began, in a low, wavering tone at first, but as he warmed with his subject and grew more interested in it, his tones grew louder and louder.

"Toby Symptom," he began, "a pattern to Quakers, inhabited a neat little house in London, beautified by the presence of his daughter Mary.

"She—scarcely seventeen, a beautiful blonde, with blue eyes, and possessing as much wisdom as beauty—was sought by all the young men among her father's acquaintance.

"Those of the neighbourhood tried in vain to win a smile. Mary was not a coquet, and so far from turning to account the effect produced by her charms, she felt so much annoyed by it that she could hardly treat with civility her many admirers, one only excepted—William Beresford, a young artist who was intimate with the family.

"A simple occurrence was the cause of this intimacy.

"Premature death had taken away the wife of the Quaker, still in her youth and beauty, and he, wishing to perpetuate the memory of one so near to him, had called a painter to her death-bed.

"It was there that William first met the afflicted daughter.

"There, between the tears of one and the sacred employment of the other, grew up a serious attachment.

"A year passed over, that only served to strengthen the bond formed under such circumstances, and the young man had already ventured to declare his hopes and desires.

"Toby had no reasons for opposing the inclinations of the young couple.

"Without being rich, William earned, by means of his brush and palette, enough honourably to maintain a family.

"His father, Mr. Beresford, an old city merchant, had retired with an immense fortune, a rare example of rapid success in speculations so rapid that very few persons had been able to follow their progress.

"Mr. Beresford, being of a quick, stern disposition, lived alone in the West End of London, without troubling

himself about his son, and leaving his son to shift for himself.

"He was one of those obliging egotists who trouble no one in order not to be troubled themselves—one of the most perfectly complaisant, providing nothing is asked of them.

"William, then, had nothing to hinder his courtship of the fair Quakeress.

"Knowing well that her father would not oppose her marriage, the situation of the lovers was most prosperous; and honest Toby waited for nothing to fix the wedding-day, saving the back rents due from his farms, intending to set apart that income to defray the expenses of the occasion.

"With this view, he left for the country, a few miles from London, in order to arrange his affairs.

"He was absent from home but a single day, and returning at night on horseback, he perceived, a little in advance, a horseman who blocked up the road.

"He stopped for a moment, uncertain whether to proceed or to turn back.

"While in this predicament, the stranger advanced towards him.

"It was too late to think of escaping, and, putting the best possible face on the affair, he started his horse again.

"As he approached the troublesome stranger, he perceived that he was masked—an unpleasant augury of what was soon confirmed.

"The unknown drew a pistol, and pointing it to the traveller, demanded his purse.

"The Quaker was not a coward, but, calm in character, inoffensive in religion, and unable to resist an armed man, he drew from his pocket, with the greatest coolness, his purse, containing twelve guineas.

"The highwayman took it and counted out the money, and let the Quaker pass, who, believing himself cleared, quickened his pace to a trot.

"But the highwayman, seeing how little resistance had been offered, and hoping for more booty, soon rejoined honest Toby, and again blocked up the way, and, pointing his pistol, cried out:

"Your watch!"

"The Quaker, although surprised, did not show it in the least, and coolly took out his watch, and, noticing the time, placed the jewel in the hand of the thief, saying:

"Now, I pray you, let me go home, for my daughter will feel uneasy at my absence."

"One moment," replied the masked cavalier, growing more urgent by his continued docility. "Swear that you have no other sum!"

"I never swear," replied the Quaker.

"Well, then, affirm that you have about you no more money, and, upon the word of a highwayman, I will not resort to violence towards a man who yields with so much grace. I will no further molest you."

Toby reflected a moment, and shook his head.

"Whoever thou art," he said, gravely, "you have noticed that I am a Quaker, who would not conceal the truth, although at the risk of my life. In my saddle-bags I have the sum of two hundred pounds sterling."

"Two hundred pounds sterling?" cried the highwayman, whose eyes glistened through his mask.

"If you are good—if you are humane," replied the Quaker—"you will not take away this money. My daughter is about being married, and this sum is necessary for the occasion. It would be a long time before I could get together a similar one. The dear child loves her intended, and it would be exceedingly cruel to deny their union. You have a heart—perhaps you have loved. You would not—cannot do so wicked an action!"

"What's your daughter, her lover, or their marriage to do with me? Fewer words and more promptness! Give me the money!"

Toby, sighing, raised the saddle-bags, took out a heavy sack, and handed it slowly to the masked man, and then attempted to gallop off.

"Hold on, my Quaker friend!" said the other, seizing the bridle. "The moment of your arrival, you will denounce me to the magistrates—that is usual, and I have nothing to say; but I must at least be beyond a pursuit to-night. My mare is feeble enough, and, what's more, she is fatigued. Your horse, on the contrary, appears vigorous, for the weight of the sack did not encumber

him. Dismount. Give me your horse. You may take mine if you wish."

"It was too late to think of resisting, and, although the increasing demands were of a nature to heat the bile of the most patient man, Toby dismounted, and with resignation accepted the sorry jade that was left in exchange.

"Had I known this," he contented himself with thinking, "I should have run away when I first met the rascal, and certainly he would never have overtaken me with this courser."

"Meanwhile, the masked man, thanking him ironically for his complaisance, burying his rowels in the horse's flanks, disappeared.

"Before arriving in London, the plundered traveller had time to reflect upon his situation, and upon the disappointment of the poor young folks who loved each other so much, and whose happiness would be postponed.

"The sum taken from him was irrecoverably lost. There was no means to find or recognise the audacious thief.

"Nevertheless, as though struck by a sudden idea, he stopped short.

"Yes," he said, "I may succeed by this means. If this man resides in London, perhaps I shall be able to find him, as Heaven has doubtless determined that he should be imprudent."

"A little consoled by some hope, Toby went home, without appearing in the least trouble, and without speaking of his adventure.

"He did not go to the magistrate, but embraced his daughter, who, doubting nothing, retired and slept soundly.

"Next morning, he bethought himself to aid Providence to make researches.

"Bringing out the mare from the stable where she had passed the night, he placed the bridle upon her neck, hoping that the animal, guided by habit, would naturally go to her master's house.

"He let the unchecked beast go free in the streets of London, and followed her.

"But he overrated her instinct.

"For a long time she walked about, making a thousand turns and curves, without object, without directions—sometimes stopping, then starting in a contrary direction.

"Toby despaired.

"The thief," he thought, "never resided in London. How silly I was not to notify the magistrate before it was too late, instead of depending upon the animal to find the way!"

"He was interrupted in his reflections by the cries of children who had been nearly trod upon by the mare.

"A moment since so quiet, she now started to run.

"Stop her—stop her!" cried everyone.

"Let her go!" cried the Quaker. "In the name of Heaven, don't stop her!"

"Following with anxiety the course of the animal, he saw her enter the half-open gateway of a splendid residence at the West End.

"It's here," thought the Quaker, raising his eyes to heaven in thanks to Providence.

"Then, in passing before the house, he saw a servant in the yard patting the beast and conducting her to the stables.

"He then asked the first person he met the name of the occupier of the house.

"What! are you such a stranger in this part of the town that you don't know the residence of the rich merchant, Beresford?"

"Toby's astonishment prevented him from replying.

"Beresford!" repeated the man, believing that he had not been understood—"you know well—the man who has made so great a fortune."

"Thanks, my friend—thanks!" replied Toby.

"He was unable to recover himself.

"Beresford—William's father—a respected man—ho my thief!"

"He believed himself the butt of a dream, and wished to return home. Nevertheless, he called to mind several instances of respectable men who had been connected with bands of malefactors. Then this immense fortune, the source of which was so uncertain—then this mare, who seemed to be going to her master.

"Toby resolved to solve the mystery.

"He went boldly into the yard, and demanded speech with the master, who, although it was nearly noon, was still in bed—another indication of a night of fatigue.

"The Quaker insisted upon being introduced immediately, and soon found himself in Beresford's bed-chamber.

"He had just awoke, and rubbing his eyes, asked, a little out of humour:

"Who are you, sir, and what do you want?"

"The sound of the voice awakened Toby's recollection and completed his conviction.

"Quietly taking a chair, he posted himself near the bed, without removing his hat.

"You remain covered!" said the surprised merchant.

"I am a Quaker," replied the other, with much calmness, "and, you know, such is our usage."

"At the first words, Beresford sprang up, and closely examined his visitor.

"He recognised him, and turned pale.

"Well," he asked, stammeringly, "what is the business that has brought you hither?"

"I ask pardon for having shown so much haste," replied Toby, "but among friends it is not usual to stand upon much ceremony, and I have come, without form, to ask you for my watch, which you borrowed yesterday."

"The watch?"

"I value it much. It was my poor wife's, and I cannot do without it! My brother-in-law—the alderman—would never forgive me for letting a jewel which recalls to mind his sister pass from my hand a day!"

"The name of the alderman seemed to make some impression upon Beresford.

"Without waiting for a reply, Toby continued:

"You will much oblige me by returning those ten guineas which I lent you at the same time. Nevertheless, if you are in want of them, I consent to lending them to you, upon the condition that you give me a proper receipt."

"The coolness of the Quaker so much disconcerted the merchant that he did not deny the possession of the stolen articles; but, not wishing to acknowledge it, he hesitated to reply, and Toby added:

"I have told you of the projected marriage of my daughter Mary. I had reserved a sum of two hundred pounds sterling for the bride's portion; but I have met with an accident. Last evening, on the London Road, I was completely robbed—so completely that I have come to pray you to give your son a marriage portion, which had it not been for that I should never have asked of you."

"My son?"

"Eh?—yes. Don't you know that it is he who is in love with Mary, and is to marry her?"

"William?" cried the merchant, throwing himself at the foot of the bed.

"William Beresford," calmly replied the Quaker, taking a pinch of snuff. "Let us see you do something for him; I should not like him to know what passed last night, but if you do not furnish the sum I have promised, it will be necessary for me to tell him how I lost it."

"Beresford ran to a desk, opened it, and placed in Toby's hand his watch, his purse, and his sack of money.

"Good!" said the Quaker, on receiving them. "I see that I was right in depending upon you."

"Is that all you wish?" asked the merchant, in a brisk tone.

"No—I require something further of your friendship."

"Speak!"

"You must disinherit your son."

"How?"

"You must disinherit him. I don't wish it to be said that I have speculated upon your fortune."

"And speaking these words, the Quaker left the chamber.

"No," he murmured, when alone, "children are not bound by the faults of their parents. Mary shall marry the son of this man, but touch his stolen money—never!"

"Ho, my friend!" he cried to Beresford as soon as he was in the yard, for he perceived the merchant looking out of window—"order my horse to be brought out."



[THE CONSTERNATION AT THE ROADSIDE INN.]

"A few minutes after, Toby, well mounted, carrying behind him his bag of money, and provided with his watch and purse, at a moderate pace regained his house.

"I have just made my marriage visit to your father," he said to William, whom he found there. "I believe that we shall be able to agree."

"Two hours afterwards, Beresford arrived at Toby's house, and taking him aside, said:

"Honest Quaker, your proceedings have touched me to the bottom of my heart. You might have dishonoured me, dishonoured my son, ruined me in his eyes, and made him unhappy in refusing him your daughter. You have acted like a wise man and a man of heart. I wish no longer to blush in your presence. Take these papers. Good-bye—you will never see me again!"

"He then left.

"The Quaker opened the papers.

No. 151.—BLUESKIN.

"First there were cheques for large amounts on the first houses in London.

"Then came a list of names, and by the side of each name was placed the amount of larger or smaller sums. A note was joined to it, upon which the Quaker read as follows:

"These are the names of those who have been robbed. The figures are the amounts that ought to be returned. Draw the money from my bankers, as though for the purpose of foreign exchange, and then make the restitution secretly. All which remains will be my legitimate fortune, and your daughter will be able to accept of my inheritance."

"The next morning Beresford had left London, and all believed that he was gone to live on his income in France.

"On the marriage day of William and Mary, the Quaker

assembled a large number of joyous friends, among whom might be noticed a number of persons rejoicing themselves with the proceeds of the London thieves, who, by the interference of Toby, had been induced to return to them their stolen property with interest.

CHAPTER DCCXIII.

A SINGULAR AND UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL TAKES PLACE AT THE ROADSIDE INN.

The old man's tale was listened to with the utmost attention, and when he concluded it he was saluted with a universal burst of applause.

"Good—very good, sir!" said the landlord. "I like that better than your song. If there's one thing more than another that tickles my fancy, it is a good tale well told. I will go round with the hat; and we ought to collect something good this time, for it has been a regular treat."

The old man blushed, and appeared greatly confused at hearing the rough praises.

But he was needy and in want, and therefore he watched the circulation of the hat with very great interest.

All contributed as largely as they could afford, and the poor author could scarcely believe that he had suddenly grown so rich.

"I wish I could thank you, gentlemen all," he said, as he pocketed the coin—"that is, I can thank you, but not in the manner that you deserve. However, you must take the will for the deed."

This they were by no means disinclined to do.

Jack and Blueskin had been interested with what was going on, but now the former, leaning towards his companion, whispered:

"Don't you think it is time we were starting?"

"I do; the storm appears to have given over."

"It does; we will pay our reckoning and be off. I am glad we took shelter here, for we have rested ourselves and not attracted any suspicion."

"You are right."

Just as Blueskin was in the act of summoning the landlord, a sudden commotion arose outside, and by a natural kind of instinct he paused in order to ascertain if possible the cause of it.

The hoarse murmur of many voices, the trampling of feet, and a babel of other sounds could now be heard, each moment increasing in plainness as they drew nearer to the inn.

"Bless my heart!" ejaculated the landlord—"what's that?"

So suddenly had the noise come upon them, that all sat perfectly still in their seats incapable of doing anything further than staring into each other's countenances.

Before the landlord could go to the front door it was suddenly dashed open, and a throng of persons poured in.

At first, nothing could be distinguished but a turbulent mass of people; but when they all entered the kitchen and drew aside somewhat, it was perceived that they carried some dark, heavy object.

As soon as it was caught sight of an immediate and intense interest was felt in it.

The men were carrying a wooden hurdle that had been hastily torn up from some field, and on it lay at full length a human form that was covered up, however, by a large, black riding cloak.

"An accident?" said the landlord.

"Yes," was the reply, as they set their burden down in front of the fire—"a sad accident too, I'm afraid. Is there a surgeon anywhere about?"

"If it is no more than a simple hurt," said a voice, "I can attend to it."

"Come forward, then."

An elderly man rose up from where he had been sitting and came towards the fire.

He stooped down and drew aside the cloak, asking as he did so:

"How did the accident happen?"

"He was thrown from his horse," was the answer; "the animal suddenly grew restive about something—the storm, we suppose—and threw him off with great violence; he has laid perfectly still ever since, showing no signs of life."

"I don't think he is dead either," said the one who had

volunteered to come forward; "if we are careful we may restore him."

"Let him be carried upstairs at once," said the landlord; "in a case like this, who could help being charitable?"

Perhaps the landlord was induced to make this speech by the appearance of the stranger.

He was dressed plainly, but yet in rich attire, and no doubt if he recovered he would pay handsomely for the attention that had been paid; or, on the other hand, if he died, he would have relatives who would defray all expenses with the same amount of liberality.

Surely this stranger could be nothing either to Jack or Blueskin, and yet they felt a strange inclination to linger.

To be sure, although the thunder and lightning had ceased, the rain continued to fall, and this might have been one reason for their remaining.

At any rate, they stopped, though they did not crowd round the body like some of the others did.

"Yes," said the one who had taken upon himself the duties of a surgeon, "he would be much better carried upstairs and placed in a bed—let it be done forthwith."

"Very good," said the landlord, with a flourish. "Mary Jane, light a large fire in the best front bedroom."

"What sort of a staircase is it?" asked the surgeon.

"Why?"

"If it is a broad one we can carry him up on the hurdle just as he is, and that would be better than disturbing him."

"Oh yes, you can manage that," was the answer.

"Come along then, three or four of you," said the surgeon; "lift him up carefully—mind how you do it. There, that will do."

When the hurdle was raised, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard could not forbear from standing up in the hope of obtaining a glimpse of the person that lay extended upon it.

The cloak still remained covering over a portion of his body, but the face remained fully revealed.

No sooner did they catch sight of it than both started violently, and it was only by a powerful exercise of self-control that they prevented the escape of an ejaculation from their lips.

But for the fact that the attention of all present was concentrated upon one object, the change in their manner must have been noticed.

As it was, it escaped observation altogether.

The next moment the strange-looking procession passed out of the kitchen and made its way upstairs.

Jack and Blueskin did not follow—they were glad of the opportunity of saying a few words to each other as soon as they were left alone.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Jack—"can it be possible?"

"I can scarcely believe my own eyes," answered Blueskin. "I was regularly staggered."

"So was I; but yet there can surely be no doubt. Are you quite sure of his identity?"

"Quite certain; I could point him out from a thousand. I am as sure that he is Steggs as I am that you are Jack Sheppard."

"Hush—hush! pray don't mention that name under any roof, even in a whisper—you know not what ears may catch it."

"True; the caution is a good one, and you will find that I shall not offend again. However, as we are alone, let us have a few words on this point."

"Well, the question is for us to consider whether his accidental presence here has anything to do with us?"

"I should think not."

"So should I; but yet you must remember how closely and intimately connected he is with what we have sworn to accomplish, and also that he is now, or was when we last heard of him, in close attendance upon Edgeworth Bess."

Jack started again.

"Surely——" he said.

"I say nothing," interrupted Blueskin; "the question to me is whether we should leave here without endeavouring first of all to have a few moments' conversation with him?"

"But his state is so dangerous."

"So it appears to be just at present; yet if he has been thrown from his horse he may soon recover from the effects of that accident."

"And," said Jack, anxiously, "we have yet to know where he was riding in such speed. Surely the circumstances were of no ordinary importance that would make him willing to face such a storm as this has been."

"That's what I could not help thinking myself; and that he rode through it is pretty evident by the account given by the men who brought him in."

"I am perplexed, Blueskin—quite perplexed. My mind begins to be filled with all manner of forebodings. Some evil, I am sure, has happened."

He clasped his hands over his head as he spoke, and bent down over the table.

"Don't give up like that, Jack—that is never worth while, I am sure; let us ascertain the amount of the misfortune before we begin to grieve over it."

"But I fear a thousand things," was the reply.

"But it is foolish to torment yourself with fears alone—I would never do that; wait in patience for a while, and then we shall, doubtless, be able to ascertain."

"I have a thought," he cried, suddenly, "it is certain there is no suspicion against us here."

"Quite certain."

"Well, then, no doubt, if we ask for it, we can be accommodated with a sleeping chamber; then we could stay, and take the very first opportunity we could of joining Steggs, and having a few minutes' conversation with him."

"A good plan—the best under the circumstances that we could adopt. When the landlord returns I will speak to him about it."

"I shall be glad if you will; I feel almost incapable of calm speech myself."

"But you must not allow your agitation to be visible, or all manner of suspicions will be aroused. Be calm for your own sake and for mine."

"I will—I will. But rely upon it, some evil has befallen Edgeworth Bess, and when he met with this accident Steggs must have been riding off somewhere for assistance."

CHAPTER DCCXIV.

REVERTS ONCE MORE TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF EDGORTH BESS.

BEFORE the cause of Steggs's unexpected appearance at the roadside inn can be explained it will be necessary to go back for some time, to revert, indeed, to the doings of Edgeworth Bess, of whom we have for a long time lost sight.

It will be remembered that her claims had been admitted, and that, by the powerful influence of the Lord Chancellor, she was placed in that position which was justly her own, and from which she had been so long kept out by the villany of her uncle.

It was, however, with a heavy and saddened heart that she left the Lord Chancellor's abode, for what must be her future residence.

This was a fine old mansion, in Oxfordshire, known by the name of the Manor House.

She was accompanied by Steggs, whose face was indeed the only familiar one around her.

All the others were perfect strangers, though many of them could recollect her parents, and were willing to give her a warm welcome on that very account.

It was some time before she could thoroughly recover herself from the great change which had taken place in her position; she could scarcely realize that it was out of the power of Jonathan Wild or anyone else to persecute her further.

At length, however, when she felt more calm and composed, she would occupy her thoughts by endeavouring to decide what should be her future plan of action.

Life in that place by herself, and separated from one who was so dear to her, was unendurable—she could not think of it for a moment.

"Tell me," she said, addressing Steggs one day on the subject—"tell me whereabouts Jack Sheppard and Blueskin are, or, if you know it go to them, and be the bearer of a message from me."

Steggs shook his head.

"I have no idea where they are at present," he replied, "and nothing that will serve me as a clue to guide me to them."

Edgeworth Bess clasped her hands.

"But surely—surely," she exclaimed, "you could, if you felt so inclined, discover them?"

"I might; but yet I think it would be better not to interfere with their movements just at present."

"Why not?"

"You know full well that they have both set their minds upon the accomplishment of one object, and until they have attained it they will not rest, or listen to anything else."

"And that object?"

"Is, as you know, to capture Jonathan Wild, and place him securely in the hands of the officers of justice; then, when that villain has met with the fate he so justly deserves, they will be free, and at liberty to adopt any plan for their future life."

"If I could see them," said Edgeworth Bess, who could not avoid shuddering at the bare mention of Jonathan Wild's name—"if I could see them I believe my influence would be strong enough to persuade them to give up this intention—to abandon this scheme of revenge."

"I think not," said Steggs, decisively. "It is a duty they owe themselves, and owe you as well, and I may as well take the opportunity of telling you that I have made up my mind to join in this pursuit; nothing could turn me from it, nor shall I be able to rest until I feel assured Jonathan Wild has met with his just doom."

"No, no—not you as well," said Edgeworth Bess; "if you go too, I shall be alone."

"Don't ask me to remain," said Steggs, "and I think you will not if you take the matter fully into consideration."

"How so?"

"When I am also on the track, can you not see that the chances of capturing Jonathan Wild will be very much increased? Depend upon it, our object will be achieved in much less time if we all unite and act together."

"It will—it will; I can see that. But I have such a horror of that dreadful man."

"No doubt you have—it is no more than reasonable that you should; but I have no such terrors—my breast only burns for vengeance upon him."

"If I could advise," she said, with a sigh, "I should say leave him to the officers of justice, who, sooner or later, must lay their hands upon him; this interference of yours must be in every way productive of danger."

"You must not be offended if I say that you would have much difficulty in making either myself or the others think so."

"And you really have no idea where they are, Steggs?"

"None whatever, except that I feel certain they are on Jonathan Wild's track, and, wherever he may be at this present moment, I'll warrant they are not far off. Control your anxiety and impatience for a little while, and then the result will be all that you can wish."

"I am tired of being here, Steggs, and alone," she replied. "I am longing for some change to take place in my life—it is growing intolerable."

Steggs looked at her in surprise.

"Can it be possible?" he said. "You have attained the summit of your wishes—you have wealth, position—everything!"

"Not everything," was the answer, "for I have neither happiness nor content."

"But the reason is because you will not mingle with society as you ought; in a little while all this feeling of strangeness and desolation would wear off."

"No, no, Steggs—never. I cannot bear to enter into any public assembly—it is most painful to me."

"In what way?"

"No sooner do I appear than there is a general start of surprise—all eyes are fixed upon me, and when they are turned away it is in order that whispered remarks respecting me may be circulated."

"But you should take no notice of such trifling things as these."

"To me, I can assure you, they are no trifles. My story is a strange one; but so far from exciting pity, I obtain nothing more than contempt. I have overheard the most galling, insulting remarks, and I am determined to

hear them no more; if they will say such things they shall not be said in my presence."

Steggs was silent for a moment or two, and then he asked:

"What plan for the future have you sketched out for yourself?"

"I can scarcely say that I have sketched out anything; I have only a vague idea before me."

"What is it?"

"To draw to my side those who have been my friends for so long under such adverse circumstances, and then to quit England for some foreign land, returning here no more."

"And what shall you do then?"

"That I have not paused to consider yet, but I know full well, and I rejoice at it, that I am now rich, and placed far beyond the reach of want. We may either remain in some obscure place, or travel from one country to another."

"It is a good plan," said Steggs, at length—"I cannot say anything against it."

"Then you are in its favour?" she cried, eagerly.

"Will you not do something to aid me to carry it out?"

"Everything."

"Then go at once to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, and endeavour to persuade them to give up their idea of revenge, and so prepare to leave England at once, while they are safe and at liberty to do so."

"Everything but that," said Steggs, "and that I refuse only because I am fully persuaded that it is quite useless to ask anything of the kind. It is the one settled idea—the one fixed purpose of their lives, and they will never rest in peace until they have accomplished it."

"Alas—alas that it should be so! There are times when a sad presentiment comes over me that the end of all this will be some terrible disaster, which might be averted by leaving England in good time!"

"That is only a fancy," was the answer, "and you will be wise if you discard such things entirely—you will be happier, too. Let me persuade you that it will be much the best if you allow me to start off without delay to join in this pursuit. Jonathan's capture will thus be made more certain, and will be accomplished sooner. If you refuse me, I shall do nothing but chafe and fret for freedom."

"I will not refuse you, and I trust that all will turn out for the best, but I confess I have very great misgivings."

"Wait with patience, and I promise that the result shall be all that you can wish."

"I hope so too."

"Then, when our object is accomplished—when we know that we have nothing more to dread from Jonathan Wild—when we feel certain that he has met with his just reward, Blueskin and Jack will only be too glad to fall in with your views, and to leave England."

"Then I must content myself with that arrangement. When shall you start?"

"Now, if you will let me. The less time there is lost of course the better it must be."

"But how long do you contemplate being absent?"

"That is more than I can tell you. No longer than I can help."

"Then I must make this stipulation. As frequently as ever you can find the opportunity, you must return here to me, and report what progress you have made. Remember that without you I shall be quite lonely, and all the time you are absent I shall be full of suspense."

"I will—you may depend upon my doing that," said Steggs. "Whenever I can get the chance, I will see you, because I know that it will relieve your anxiety greatly. I trust that the first message I deliver will be that we have succeeded."

"So do I, with all my heart, for, although Jonathan has been so bitter a foe to me, yet I cannot desire his death, though I feel, at the same time, that the crimes he has perpetrated should not go unpunished."

"That's a just view to take of the question, and, as you must be well aware, he is a bold and desperate man—in fact, he stands alone, a being like himself, without having any other parallel in nature. The officers, having nothing more than duty and the prospect of reward to urge them on, would be long before they effected the capture of such a one; but with stronger and more

powerful motives, such as I possess in common with Jack and Blueskin, the result must be very different, for we should never tire or weary in our pursuit."

"It is so. Return, then, as quickly as you can. Until you come back, I shall count the time by seconds."

CHAPTER DCCXV.

EDGORTH BESS MAKES A SINGULAR DISCOVERY AT THE OLD MANOR HOUSE.

STEGGS was full of impatience.

Now that permission to go had been accorded to him, he felt that he could not possibly remain.

In less than an hour afterwards he set out.

He was provided for his expedition by one of the best horses in the stable, and by some firearms of excellent make.

As we know from the past, Steggs had no slight cause for desiring to be revenged upon Jonathan Wild.

He had suffered greatly at his hands, and his was a nature not to calmly put up with such treatment and to forgive it.

He felt the strongest, deepest craving for revenge, and as he rode along he made up his mind that his vengeance should be sure, certain, and immediate.

His resolution was that, at all risks and hazards, he would fire at Jonathan Wild the very first time he got within range of his pistols.

It might not be a manner of dealing with him altogether to be approved of, but Steggs was impatient to have his revenge gratified.

He clenched his teeth hard, and rode off at random, for he knew not in what direction to search for the object of his hate.

But he knew that the police officers were on his track in considerable numbers, and therefore he believed that he could not possibly go far without meeting with some intelligence.

Without going into detail, however, we may say that for a long time he was totally unsuccessful in learning anything, from the simple reason that as yet Jonathan Wild had not made his appearance in that part of the country.

Having come with this certainty to this conclusion, Steggs determined to return to the Old Manor House, and inform Edgworth Bess of his want of success so far.

Accordingly he did so, and told her that it would be necessary for him to go much further than he had already done, and consequently that a much longer time must necessarily elapse before he could see her again.

Of course he was equally unable to give her any intelligence respecting Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, though from the fact that he had heard nothing of them it was quite reasonable to conclude that they were in perfect safety.

Edgworth Bess watched him depart with tears in her eyes.

When he was with her she did not experience that terrible feeling of loneliness which characterised his absence.

The room she generally occupied was situated in a kind of turret at one wing of the large building.

She chose it because its elevation was considerably above any other portion of the edifice, and, by consequence, because from the windows she could command a very extensive view of the surrounding scenery.

Here she would sit for hours and hours, day after day, straining her eyes in endeavouring to pierce the distance, and hoping every moment to catch sight of the form of one of her friends approaching.

But every day she was doomed to disappointment.

The servants in the old house wondered greatly at her manner, but they had been so long without a mistress that they scarcely noticed her absence from among them.

Her retirement was complete.

No hermit could have isolated himself more thoroughly.

Steggs had now been absent a long, long time—much longer than she had anticipated or he had given her reason to expect.

Her mind suggested a thousand reasons for this non-

appearance, and, of course, the most prominent one was that some terrible accident had befallen him.

One evening, when she was expecting the return of Steggs every moment—the evening after the night on which Jonathan Wild and his son had had such a singular adventure in the old cavern, and had so narrowly escaped with their lives—she sat watching until long after the sun had set—until, indeed, the beautiful twilight deepened into darkness, and hid all objects from her view.

Then, with a heavy sigh, she turned back into the room, and was surprised to find how dark it had grown.

She knew it not, but for some time the heavens had presented a lowering and terrible appearance, threatening to break forth into a storm of no ordinary violence.

Her first thought was to procure a light, and as the means were at hand, this was accomplished easily.

She set a large lamp down on the table, and remained seated for a little while in an attitude of profound thought.

Then, rising to her feet, unable any longer to subdue her agitation, she went to the window and looked out.

The heavens still looked dark and threatening, but as yet no rain had begun to fall.

Turning back, she walked round and round the room several times uneasily.

On each occasion she passed over the large hearthstone in front of the antique fireplace, and each time she trod upon it she fancied it moved slightly in its setting.

It was a trifling thing to take notice of, but her mind was in a peculiar condition, and she felt it to be a positive relief to have something to think about.

She remembered now that more than once before she had noticed the stone move beneath her feet, but had never deemed the circumstance worthy of a second thought.

Now she stooped down, prompted by an irresistible curiosity to endeavour to ascertain the cause.

She found that when standing at one end the other was considerably elevated.

It might be only from the effects of age, but she had often heard how people had chosen such places to secrete money and other valuables.

Some discovery might be awaiting her, for she knew full well that there were many strange, dark secrets connected with the history of her family.

With some little difficulty she managed, while standing at one end of the hearthstone, to insert a small wedge of wood, which prevented it from falling back into its setting.

Then, putting forth her strength, she slowly raised the stone an inch or two, and moved it little by little from its position.

She was encouraged to do this because she noticed at once there was a dark, deep, hollow place beneath.

In the excitement caused by this discovery she forgot all about the many anxieties and troubles that were pressing upon her mind.

When the stone had been pushed almost completely away, she went to the table and fetched the lamp.

With this in her hand, she knelt down beside the opening in the flooring, and proceeded to make a more minute investigation.

She then perceived, for the first time, that there was a flight of narrow, dark, uneven stairs, descending in a circular manner like those in a small round tower.

To what place these steps could lead she was unable to form a conjecture.

For a long time she remained holding the lamp in her hand, and looking down, endeavouring to account for the presence of stairs in so singular a place.

At that moment a strong desire came over her to descend the steps on an exploring expedition.

The house was her own, and surely no one was more fitted to become acquainted with its secrets than herself.

Moreover, she had no fears or misgivings about undertaking such a task.

Whatever dangers there might be in her way, she felt that by the use of a little caution and presence of mind she should be able to overcome them.

Yet, in spite of her boldness and confidence, she shrank a little from commencing the descent, the place looked so dark, and dismal, and chill.

But nerving herself for the effort, she placed her feet upon the first step, and then began to go down slowly.

The greatest care was necessary, for the steps, besides being imperfectly made and much decayed by age, were covered with moisture, which rendered them exceedingly slippery.

More than once she narrowly escaped a fall to the bottom.

Lower and lower she went, and was unable to find any signs of a termination to the steps.

She seemed no nearer the bottom than before.

Suddenly, and somewhat unexpectedly, she found her further progress barred by something that seemed like a door.

If it was one, it was of a most singular construction.

Bars of wood, or some similar material, crossed it in several directions; and the whole was so loaded with dirt and so blackened by age that it was impossible to tell by sight alone what it was.

She stretched out her hand and touched it.

Unconsciously she pressed a greater weight upon it than she intended, and, to her surprise, the substance before her immediately gave way.

A cloud of dust arose and almost stifled her, and well nigh extinguished the lamp.

But in a moment or two it subsided.

She had no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that the substance before her was canvas, or something similar, and that it had grown so tender and rotten with age that the pressure of her hand had forced a hole completely through it.

What might be upon the other side she could not tell, but was most anxious to ascertain.

Accordingly, she approached the aperture carefully, and held up the lamp in the best position she could.

Looking through, she then found that she commanded a view of an apartment, though of what kind or dimensions she was unable, from the deficiency of light, to tell.

It was strange that there should be such a means of communication between two apartments, and quite out of the question to decide for what purpose it had originally been constructed.

Most certainly, however, many, many years had elapsed since it was last made use of.

She stepped back a pace or two, and again looked at what she had first taken for a door.

She was now able to conclude easily enough that the pieces of wood she had seen crossing each other so mysteriously were used for the purpose of stretching the canvas over them.

She was unable to perceive any mode of opening the door, for such, no doubt, was the purpose it was intended to serve.

She did not give herself much trouble, either, to make the examination, for she knew how easily the place had yielded to her touch, and she could see a space between the bars of wood large enough for her to pass through, so that all that was necessary was to push away the canvas.

CHAPTER DCCXVI.

EDGORTH BESS CONTINUES HER EXPLORATIONS, AND MAKES SOME STRANGE DISCOVERIES.

REMEMBERING how the dust had arisen on the previous occasion, she set about performing this task with great circumspection, using no more pressure than was absolutely necessary.

Despite her care, however, the dust arose and settled upon her in incredible quantities.

It was with a feeling of great relief that she managed at last to pass through the small aperture she had made into the apartment beyond.

She stood a moment, to recover herself, and to allow the lamp to burn up more steadily.

The air in this chamber seemed damp and heavy, as though a long time had elapsed since any fresh air had gained admittance there.

The feeling of oppression upon her lungs quickly wore off, and the flame of the lamp assumed larger dimensions.

By the aid of this light she now looked carefully about her on all sides.

The room was one of no ordinary size, and furnished

with peculiar magnificence, although the beauty of everything was much obscured by dust.

In what part of the building this room was situated she was scarcely able to tell.

But the edifice itself was so large and of such a rambling character that it would take a long time to grow thoroughly familiar with every portion of it.

For some reason, however, this room had remained closed up for a very great length of time—for so long, indeed, that probably the inmates of the house had completely forgotten its existence.

But what was the cause of this extraordinary proceeding?

That was the question that in a moment suggested itself to the mind of Edgworth Bess, and she kept repeating it over and over again to herself, without being able to arrive at any definite conclusion.

Having satisfied herself by making an attentive examination of everything the room contained, she looked back at the means by which she had entered it.

She then perceived that the wall had been ornamented in a strange and peculiar manner, and canvas had been stretched over the opening in the wall, so as to render it quite uniform.

It was certain, however, that anyone standing at the foot of the flight of steps would be able to overhear distinctly every word that was uttered in the large apartment.

Nearly opposite to this secret door was one about which no kind of concealment had been attempted.

It was large and massive, and set in a heavy wooden frame, and appeared to be the only regular mode of egress and ingress to the chamber.

Towards this door Edgworth Bess advanced with slightly faltering steps.

In spite of her courage and calmness, the cold, raw atmosphere in the room clung around her and affected her spirits.

She drew her breath with difficulty, and she felt that it would be such a relief to hear even the slightest sound that would break the dreadful, tomblike silence.

She might have raised her own voice and uttered her own thoughts aloud, but some kind of spell or fascination seemed to seal her lips, and she could not utter so much as a whisper.

Upon coming close to this large door her heart sank within her, for she feared, from its general aspect, that there would be an end to all her explorations.

It looked so massive and so strong as to be altogether beyond her power to force it.

Nervously and doubtfully she placed her hand upon the knob.

To her surprise, when she turned it the door yielded readily to her hand.

It communicated with another but much smaller room than the preceding one.

The same luxuriousness was, however, perceptible—indeed, rather more so, for here, owing to some cause or other, the dust did not appear to have accumulated in such large quantities.

Beyond the articles of furniture which it contained, and its general appearance, this room had no particular species of interest in it.

On the opposite side, however, a door was visible, and Edgworth Bess without delay made her way towards it, determined not to pause in her investigations until she had seen all.

Her disappointment was extreme, however, upon finding this door firmly fastened.

She placed the lamp upon an antique chair, and exerted her utmost strength, but failed to make it shake even in its setting.

"I can go no further on this occasion, at any rate," she thought, "but I will choose another opportunity, and have those with me who will be able to force their way."

A feeling of great fatigue at this moment came over her, and she sat down in a chair close to the one on which she had placed the lamp.

As she did so and looked around, a thousand strange thoughts rushed into her mind, and made her brain busy with speculations.

How singular it was that two such rooms as these should be cut off, as it were, from the remainder of the building, and left to moulder and neglect!

What circumstances could have given cause for so unusual a proceeding?

What had taken place within those walls?

In this manner she sat perfectly still for several moments.

She was aroused suddenly by a brilliant flash of light.

At first she knew not what had caused it, it came and went so suddenly.

But directly afterwards she heard a loud rumbling sound.

With a sudden splash the rain beat against the ancient windows, the lightning flashed once more, and the thunder rolled.

The threatened storm had broken out at last.

Surely if anything could add to the terror and gloominess those rooms produced, this terrific storm would have that effect.

Edgworth Bess trembled and turned pale.

She had been wishing a little while ago for some sound to break the monotony of the silence; but she did not desire such a dreadful sound as this.

The rain poured against the windows in a ceaseless stream, and in between the pauses of the thunder the rushing of the rain as it descended to the earth could be distinctly heard.

She felt more than half inclined to return with all speed to her usual apartment, and summon all her domesticities around her; but, ashamed of this symptom of weakness and fear, she banished the thought, and resolved, in spite of the elemental strife, to prosecute her researches to the utmost.

From the very first the conviction had seized upon her mind that, as there was a secret mode of entering these disused apartments, so there must be another secret mode of leaving them, and this was a point she was most anxious to clear up.

The room above had been left by means of a passage beneath the hearthstone, and therefore it formed a strong reason for commencing a search for a secret exit in this part of the room.

Going to the hearthstone, she walked upon it in the same manner as she had done upon the one above.

But, to her disappointment, it remained perfectly firm, and did not move in the least.

Unsatisfied, however, she put down the lamp, and, taking hold of one of the fire-irons, knocked upon the stone.

An unmistakably hollow sound was then produced.

"It is here," she murmured—"the discovery is made. But how am I to raise this stone? it appears to be so securely fixed in its setting."

This was a difficult problem; but, encouraged by the success she had formerly met with, she set about making the attempt.

In the first place she looked closely all round the setting, in the hope of finding some place where she could insert the fire-iron, and use it as a lever.

While thus engaged she noticed a nail with a large flat head that stuck up a little above the level of the flooring, as though it had not been sufficiently knocked in.

Guessing in a moment that this might have some connection with the stone, she pressed upon it.

To her disappointment, no result was produced.

She was about to come to the conclusion that this was an ordinary nail and nothing more, when, by accident, she tried to pull it up.

To her surprise, it yielded, and at the same time one end of the hearthstone rose slowly.

Continuing to pull upwards, she found the nail, or rather that which looked like one, came up readily, and in the same proportion the end of the hearthstone rose also.

She was afraid at first to let go, lest the stone should fall.

But she found that the mechanism with which it was connected had been so constructed that the stone remained in its place.

By pressing upon the head of the nail, however, it was gently lowered.

She continued to pull upwards, until the hearthstone was nearly perpendicular.

She had now no difficulty in understanding how it was

she had discovered the secret exit from the room above.

By some accident or other—perhaps simply from the effects of time—the mechanism had become deranged, and the stone had consequently got loose in its setting.

Here all appeared perfect, and after a brief hesitation, Edgworth Bess commenced the descent of a flight of steps precisely similar to the others.

There was this difference, however, that they were more uneven and rugged, more moist and slippery, and the air that seemed to come rushing up was so cold as to send a chill through all her blood.

The atmosphere had also a damp, peculiar, earthlike smell, like that which may be found in some long-disused vault.

Undeterred, however, by all these disagreeables, Edgworth Bess, shielding the flame of the lamp with her hand, slowly and carefully descended the circular flight of steps.

As she went lower and lower, however, so did the coldness increase.

But the air was less dense than in the chambers above, and the lamp burned more steadily, though the draught every now and then almost extinguished it.

The lamp was indeed her chief cause of solicitude, and occupied the most of her attention.

She was in dread lest a sudden gust of wind should put it out.

Her position then would be terrible in the extreme.

Her nerves would never enable her to stand against it, for she was unprovided with the means of procuring another light.

CHAPTER DCCXVII.

EDGORTH BESS MAKES A FEARFUL DISCOVERY IN THE DUNGEON BENEATH THE OLD MANOR HOUSE.

To be left in utter darkness in such a place as that was a thought too horrible to bear contemplation.

It would be hard indeed to grope the way back to the upper chamber, and no matter how loud or how shrill the voice might be, yet it would fail to reach the ears of any of the inmates of the Manor House.

Those mysterious, closed, disused apartments were quite separated and cut off from the other portions of the building, and scarcely any sound made within them would penetrate their walls.

Every now and then Edgworth Bess would pause upon the steps and tremble, for the flame of the lamp would flicker in a most alarming manner.

Then, when it once more became steady, she would descend a few more steps.

And in this manner she continued, in a state of the utmost dread, until the bottom of the flight was reached.

Here she paused, and as she found the draught was by no means so strong here as it was upon the stairs, she raised the lamp high above her head, so as to diffuse its beams as much as possible, and thereby obtain some idea of the nature of the place she was in.

Most chill and repulsive was its aspect—nothing could be conceived more dismal.

Before her stretched out a long and apparently interminable passage, the sides of which were formed of solid masses of stone, and the roof was rudely vaulted by the same material.

Everywhere the stonework was reeking with moisture, which seemed to exude in drops, as if from pores.

Large drops collected on the roof, and then, when they became too heavy for cohesion, dropped upon the damp earthen flooring, in which in many places were noisome pools of stagnant water.

Everywhere it was completely soddened with wet.

Generally the walls were perfectly black, but in some places they were coated with a strange-looking substance resembling nitre, and reflecting many of the beams that fell from the lamp.

All this was dismal and cheerless enough to deter anyone from prosecuting their investigations any further, for not only was the floor treacherous and slimy, but on all sides could be seen strange-looking, loathsome reptiles, hastening along in an ungainly fashion, scared by the unexpected sight of a light.

It was these loathsome-looking and perhaps venomous

reptiles that made Edgworth Bess for a time hesitate and hold back.

But very soon a feeling of anger at this want of courage came over her, and she resolutely stepped forward, picking her way as carefully as she could.

It was evident that many, many years had elapsed since a human foot had trodden that dark, horrid place.

At every step her feet sank deeply into the mire, but yet she struggled on, determined to ascertain, if possible, to what place the passage led, and what was the nature of its outlet.

It seemed to her that she walked on in this manner for a long distance.

In reality, it was but a few hundred yards.

Suddenly she paused, and looked with straining eyes before her.

Hitherto the sides of the passage had been uniformly of solid stone, but now, just a little further in advance, she saw an indentation in the masonry, the shape of which suggested a door.

Towards this she at once made her way, her curiosity stronger now than ever.

It was a door, she quickly found, low and narrow, but apparently of great strength; yet, upon a closer examination, the wood of which it was composed was mildewed and decayed, and the iron bosses that studded it in every direction had almost rusted away.

The only fastening that she could perceive consisted of a ponderous iron bar placed horizontally across the centre of it.

Should she put forth her strength, and try whether she could remove that bar and gain admittance to the place beyond?

She answered the question in the affirmative, for on the present occasion she would have to complete her investigations; she would never again have the least inclination to penetrate to this subterranean place.

Her first attempt to lift the bar was a perfect failure, and she considered that this was owing to its weight.

A second glance, however, undeceived her in this respect.

She saw that it turned upon its centre like a pivot, and was secured into a staple by a small bolt of iron.

This bolt was thickly incrustated with rust, and it cost much labour to withdraw it; but when it was done, it was easy to turn the bar round, and the mere act of doing this caused the door to creak open a little way.

But such a fetid smell came pouring out into the passage that Edgworth Bess was compelled to retreat before it.

Whatever place it might be with which the door communicated, the air in it was terribly impure, and certainly inimical to human life.

After awhile, however, as it mingled with the comparatively pure air in the passage, it became less offensive, and Edgworth Bess again ventured to draw near.

Pushing the door further open, she stood upon the threshold, and grasping the lamp in her hand, looked in.

All, however, was dark and indistinct.

She could only make out that it was some kind of vaulted chamber.

Reluctantly she entered, and it was only the strong desire she felt to clear up all these mysteries that gave her strength to proceed.

There was a loud scuffling noise in this vaulted chamber as soon as she entered it, which greatly terrified her, and almost compelled her to retreat.

Luckily she discovered the cause of it just in time.

She had disturbed an immense multitude of rats, which were hurrying across the damp flooring, searching for their hiding-places.

This was a sound that soon ceased, and having reached, as near as she could guess, the middle of the chamber, Edgworth Bess paused, and again looked around her.

Something white and glistening upon the floor near to the door first attracted her attention, and she walked towards it, in order to ascertain what it was.

A half-stifled shriek of horror came from her lips, and, after one brief glance, she averted her eyes from the dreadful spectacle.

Before her, lying down side by side upon the ground, and tightly clasped in each other's embrace, were two mouldering skeletons.

There was not left a single vestige of anything save

the bones, and from the manner in which these were disposed, it was hard to say whether that death-grasp was a friendly or a foe-like one.

With such a scene as that, the imagination could easily run riot and suggest a thousand strange ideas.

Multitudes of ideas would come thronging up, all of which would be alike difficult, if not impossible, of solution.

How came those two skeletons in such a place?

Why were they confined in that dungeon, for such it evidently was?

Were they two friends—two lovers, perchance more dear to each other than all the world beside, who, for some reason or other, had been confined there, and allowed to perish by some fearful, lingering death?

Or could they be two deadly enemies, who, meeting in that place, had grappled with each other and struggled and fought for mastery?

Death might have overtaken both almost at the same moment, and the firm grasp with which they held each other during life had remained in death.

Either of these would account for the position of the two skeletons, and it would be hard to decide which was right.

When the first shock of horror and disgust was over, Edgworth Bess again bent her gaze upon the frightful spectacle.

Revolting as it was, she could not help experiencing a certain kind of fascinated interest.

She noticed, however, that there were no weapons lying near.

It did not seem as though the combatants—if combatants they were—had had either sword, or dagger, or fire-arm to assist them in their fight.

And this was all that could be gleaned.

Even as she watched a great change came over those sad remains.

Had not the door of the dungeon been opened they might have remained intact for a considerable length of time.

But the effect of the fresh air upon them was such, that they began to crumble, and to lose their adherence one to the other.

Thus, while she gazed, they all sank together into one confused, inextricable mass, no longer presenting the appearance that they did at first.

It was not likely that this dungeon would afford any other object of curiosity or fearful interest, and yet Edgworth Bess searched it as closely as she was able.

In one part of the dungeon, in a corner not far from the door, was a kind of rude stone shelf.

It was some height from the ground, but yet not so high as to prevent her from reaching it.

On this small shelf, which, at the most, was not more than a foot square, lay some small, dark, dusky-looking object.

It was rather surprising that Edgworth Bess should have caught sight of it. It would have escaped a search less minute, and it only shows how rigidly she looked about her.

Her eye fell upon it, however, more by chance than anything else, and she stood gazing at it for some moments, wondering what it could be, and yet hesitating to put forth her hand to ascertain, lest some horrible discovery should be awaiting her.

This irresolution did not continue long.

Making a sudden effort, she stretched forth her hand and seized the mysterious-looking object.

But she was so nervous, and her feelings had been so much affected by what she had beheld, that her fingers relaxed, and with a faint cry she allowed it to fall to the ground.

But she was thoroughly ashamed of her fears, and stooped down immediately.

It seemed as though some rather solid substance had been wrapped up in a piece of cloth, probably a portion of a garment.

In its fall this outer covering had been somewhat deranged, and therefore, in order to ascertain what it was, all Edgworth Bess had to do was to take hold of this piece of cloth by one of the corners, and lift it up.

She did so.

CHAPTER DCCXVIII.

EDGWORTH BESS MEETS WITH AN UNLOOKED-FOR MISFORTUNE.

ALTHOUGH she held her breath, and felt full of excitement, nothing of an alarming character had been disclosed.

She saw only what looked like a packet of letters or papers, tightly tied into a square parcel.

The papers—especially the outer sheets—had quite lost their original colour, and were now a peculiar-looking yellowish brown.

Seeing what the object was, Edgworth Bess no longer hesitated to pick it up.

The papers were all damp and mildewed, and apparently so much decayed, that the least touch would cause them to fall to pieces.

She looked at the packet anxiously enough, wondering of what it could consist, and she turned it over and over in her hand.

On one occasion she fancied she saw something that looked like writing, but it was so faded and blurred as to be almost undistinguishable.

But she strained her eyes and brought the light of the lamp closer towards it.

She indulged in the not unreasonable hope, that in those papers would be found some record or account of what had taken place in the cell.

Only portions of the writing could be made out; but she was exceedingly well pleased when able, letter by letter, to spell out a single word.

The first sentence ran thus:—

"I have written this in the hope that it may fall——"

Then there was a blank, or what appeared to be such, though, doubtless, words were there but undecipherable.

The next words were:—

"No ink, no pen. As a substitute for the first I have used blood, and for the second a small piece of pointed stick that I——"

Then followed another blank.

What she had just read, however, seemed pretty conclusively to show that the paper contained an account of some strange events, and the straggling style of the writing, and the faded, peculiar-looking characters were accounted for.

There was some more writing on the outer sheet, but the only other sentence she could make out was:—

"I solemnly declare that all this that I have written with so much pain and difficulty is quite true; it is a faithful history of all those circumstances that——"

There was no more.

From the bulk of the parcel it was pretty clear that a perusal of the whole manuscript would occupy a considerable time.

Therefore it was not likely she would begin then.

Nevertheless, Edgworth Bess could not resist the impulse of turning up the corners of some of the leaves.

She considered herself well repaid for doing so, as she discovered that the inner sheets were not so discoloured, and that the writing upon them was much more distinct and plain.

Wrapping it up again in the piece of cloth in which it had been originally contained, she placed it in her pocket, determined to take an early opportunity of mastering its contents.

This done, she turned to leave the cell, though she could not take her departure until she had given one last lingering look at the two skeletons, though had she seen them at first as they were now, she could scarcely have told that the remains were those of two persons.

But her attention was attracted by something bright and glittering on the ground before her.

She bent forward and looked scrutinizingly, and saw that there were many more similar glittering points.

The very next moment she guessed what they were.

They were rats who had been disturbed at her entrance, and now they were crouching against the wall, watching her with their brilliant eyes.

They seemed to her as though they were meditating a spring upon her.

She had a natural horror of these animals, and shuddered.

Recovering her calmness as well as she was able, she



EDGWOITH BESS MAKES A HORRIBLE DISCOVERY IN THE DUNGEON BENEATH THE OLD MANOR HOUSE.

gave one spring forward, and passed out of the door of the dungeon.

Once in the passage, she felt a sensation of perfect relief.

That coolness and courage which had enabled her to carry on the adventure so far returned to her.

Yet she paused in no little irresolution.

Should she be satisfied with what she had already done, and return?

She had already been absent for a long time, and there might be only just enough oil left in the reservoir in the lamp to last her while she retraced her steps.

There would be abundant opportunities of searching the place thoroughly.

But yet, in spite of all, she felt that when once she had quitted that gloomy place she should never be able to overcome her repugnance to entering it again.

No. 152.—BLUESKIN.

Probably, as she had traversed the passage so far, it could not extend many yards further.

At any rate, she resolved to push on for a little while and ascertain.

At frequent intervals she shuddered from head to foot, and a strange feeling, which she could scarcely comprehend, settled slowly about her heart.

It was as though there was some inward monitor endeavouring to tell her that there was danger in the path she was pursuing.

Hitherto she had escaped unscathed, but who could tell what dangers there might be further on.

So strong at last did this impression grow upon her that she wavered in her course, and nearly turned back.

But considering this to be nothing but a weakness, and wishing to retain perfect command over herself, she walked resolutely on.

She was well aware that if she once admitted fears into her mind they would soon rush in, so swiftly as to render her powerless and helpless, and deprive her of all presence of mind.

Therefore, she struggled on, though by this time, owing to the dampness and chilliness of the place, her limbs were almost numbed.

Before going much further, however, she was rejoiced to find that the walls no longer presented so humid an appearance as they had done, and the ground beneath her feet was firmer and drier.

For a moment or so she was unable to find any reason for this, but suddenly she noticed that the ground was gradually rising.

The air became colder and purer, and more like the air on the face of the earth.

This encouraged her to hasten her steps, and to proceed with a greater degree of confidence.

She fully expected that she should find at no great distance off, some outlet from this subterranean passage, and if so, what reason for congratulation she would have.

How much more preferable would be the route she was now taking to the one which led through those long-closed apartments?

Soon after this, and without her receiving the least warning, the lamp suddenly went out.

She tried in vain to fan the red smouldering wick into a blaze.

It gradually and gradually grew darker, until it became invisible.

Then the darkness was terrible.

A loud shriek escaped her lips at this unlucky accident, and her footsteps were immediately arrested.

It was a wonder that she did not swoon with terror.

Fortunately, however, she retained command over herself, and, clasping her hands over her forehead, she strove to think which would be the best thing for her to do.

The path back was treacherous and full of danger, besides, without a light, she would never dare to face its horrors.

Then, as to the path before her, she knew not what its character might be, or to what pass it might lead.

While she was thinking thus, the cold air continued to blow freshly upon her, and in a little while this circumstance revived her hopes.

"Surely," she murmured, "the outlet cannot be far off. I seem now as though I could smell flowers and trees at no great distance. Surely I have only to step forward slowly and cautiously, and then all will be well."

Although she arrived at this conclusion, she found it very difficult indeed to act upon it.

She shrank instinctively from walking into the darkness; her imagination conjured up a thousand groundless dangers in her path.

She stretched out her arms at full length, and stepped forward with extreme care, not removing one foot until she had found a firm resting-place for the other, and in consequence of this slow method of progression the length of the passage was apparently increased.

A few minutes afterwards, however—although it seemed to her an hour—her feet came in contact with something lying in her path, and she had stopped, wondering what the obstruction could be.

Happening to glance upwards, however, she perceived above her head a faint glimmering of light, and yet light it could scarcely be called—it was only a species of darkness less dense than that which filled the passage.

She guessed then that she had reached the foot of a flight of steps, and that the outlet she so wished to find was above her.

This conjecture was confirmed by feeling that the cold air blew down upon the top of her head.

Feeling for the wall, she placed her hands against it, and began to ascend.

The steps were steep and spiral, and at last the top was reached.

Before her was what appeared to be some rude planking, roughly joined together—so roughly, that between each piece there was an interval through which she could have thrust her finger.

This was the source from which the pure air had come, and, placing her lips close to these interstices, she seemed to drink it in eagerly.

Straining her eyes, and looking through the narrow

aperture as well as she was able, she fancied that she could see before her some portion of the garden or ground surrounding the old Manor House.

Having made this discovery, she passed her hands rapidly everywhere over the woodwork.

But, to her intense disappointment, she failed to find anything resembling the fastening of a door.

Surely, after all that trouble, it would not be that she should find herself unable to emerge.

No, no—ten thousand times no—she would shriek and cry aloud until assistance came, provided that she found that she was unable to liberate herself.

From the feel of the woodwork, however, she concluded that it was not only thin and old, but rotten, and that a very slight exercise of strength—such strength as she herself possessed—would probably be sufficient to break it down.

At any rate, she resolved to try.

Placing her shoulder against it, she pressed with all her might.

She was rewarded by a cracking and splitting of the wood in every direction, and the next moment, as the strain was continued, one of the planks fell bodily before her with a crash.

Without a moment's loss of time she passed through, and then found that she was standing in a kind of summer-house or harbour.

Yet it was a place which, to the best of her recollection, she had never seen before, and as the interior of it was light when compared to the darkness of the passage, she was able to look well about it and note its general appearance.

It had a neglected, dilapidated aspect, and she was not long in coming to the conclusion that from some reason or other it had been long disused.

Advancing to the door, however, she looked out and saw in front the irregular mass of building known as the Manor House, and her heart bounded with joy as she beheld it.

Here, she thought, was the termination of her adventure—the safe and happy termination of it—for all she had to do was to cross the spacious garden and enter.

But even then, at that precise moment, the feeling that she had once or twice before experienced came over her heart, and this time with redoubled force.

She felt an extraordinary and unaccountable disinclination to cross the threshold of the summer-house.

She seemed to feel, without knowing why, that while she stood there she was in safety, but that as soon as she emerged into the garden there would be danger.

Surely, however, this could be no more than a foolish mental fancy, and as such she dismissed it from her thoughts.

Yet it required an effort of the will to step boldly forth.

But she did so.

No sooner had she passed some rather tall shrubs that grew near the spot than she heard a rustling among the branches behind her.

In her present state of mind this sound was an alarming one, and, with a half-uttered cry, she bounded onward, being anxious to reach the house without loss of time.

But her alarm and terror much increased, for she heard the unmistakable sound of footsteps in pursuit, and of voices speaking in undertones.

She tried to shriek and cry for help.

But her voice failed her.

She tried to fly.

But all strength seemed suddenly to desert her limbs.

Yet she struggled onward, until, coming to some slight obstruction, she stumbled and fell down.

Then, before she could rise, she felt herself roughly seized by some one, and a shawl or some such article was passed rapidly over her face and secured at the back of her head, at once preventing her from uttering a loud cry, or of seeing by whom she had been thus attacked.

CHAPTER DCCXIX.

STEGGS ARRIVES AT THE MANOR HOUSE JUST A LITTLE TOO LATE.

It was on the very night when Edgeworth Bess had all these strange adventures that Steggs, having failed so

far in his attempts to overtake or capture Jonathan Wild, had resolved once more to pay her a visit, and set her mind at rest on those points in which she would be in most suspense.

It was late, however, before he arrived.

Yet he did not scruple to arouse the servants.

Upon inquiry, he learned, to the best of their belief, their mistress had not retired to rest, but was sitting in the turret chamber.

"I must see her at once," said Steggs. "Let her know that I am here. Lead on, and I will follow."

The servant preceded him up the stairs, and, having reached the door, knocked gently at it.

No response was returned.

Again and again she knocked, and then the girl said:

"I fancy she must have retired to rest—I cannot make her hear."

"Open the door, then, a little way, and look in."

The interior of the room was profoundly dark, but as the servant carried a lamp she was able to see that it was vacant.

"She is not here," said Steggs, as he glanced around. "Well, I will wait until morning—but stop, what's the meaning of that?"

The displaced hearthstone had attracted his notice, and he hurried towards it.

Ejaculations of astonishment came from his lips, and from the lips of the girls as well, who was well-nigh ready to faint with fright.

Steggs snatched the lamp out of her trembling hand, and, holding it down, endeavoured to make out the nature of the opening in the flooring.

He discovered immediately the little flight of steps, and by marks upon them he could tell that some one had recently descended.

Amazed at so extraordinary a sight, and scarcely knowing what to think of it, Steggs stood for a time immovable.

At last, turning to the girl, he said:

"Make haste; go to your mistress's chamber and see if she is there in safety—be quick!"

The girl hurried off, and quickly returned with a face as pale as ashes.

"She is not in her room," she replied, "and has not been to-night—everything is just as I left it."

Steggs felt his heart give a sudden bound.

Some terrible event had happened, he felt sure of it.

He had arrived only just a little too late.

The appearance of this open secret passage perplexed him exceedingly, for, of course, he had no reason to suppose the truth—namely, that Edgworth Bess had discovered it by accident, and, animated by a spirit of adventure, had descended to explore it.

His resolve was quickly made.

"Get assistance," he cried, addressing the girl—"arouse the household—tell them your mistress is missing. Let them follow me down here. I will go first and see!"

He commenced the descent of the steps even while he spoke.

He reached the bottom without difficulty or delay, and by the various marks upon the ground, he was able to follow in the precise track Edgworth Bess had made.

All over the floor the dust lay very thickly, where it had accumulated during many a long year, and in this her steps had sunk, leaving an impress almost as clear and well defined as snowflakes would.

When he reached the top of the second flight of stairs, his wonder greatly increased.

She had evidently gone that way, yet what earthly motive could she have had for so extraordinary a proceeding?

Steggs, however, did not stop to think much, but, finding beyond all doubt that she had gone that way, descended the steps with as much speed as was consonant with safety.

Then the dismal, dark passage that we have already at full length described, was reached.

Viewing the noisomeness of the place, he could scarcely credit that she had proceeded further.

The black, slimy mud, however, showed incontestably that she had wandered in that direction, and, what was more, no trace could be seen of returning footsteps.

Holding the light down, and following these, scarcely giving a glance at the strange objects around him, Steggs hastened on until the dungeon door was reached.

In here he went, and he could see that she had wandered several times around the gloomy place.

He saw a confused mass of human bones lying near the door.

He touched them with his foot, and they crumbled into dust.

It was easy to see that she had left the dungeon and continued her path along the passage, and with increased speed he followed.

Then up those steps leading to the dilapidated summer-house he bounded, nor did he pause until he found himself standing in the garden.

Here, however, all was perfectly still and silent.

He raised his voice and called upon her.

But no sound was returned.

His cries, nevertheless, were strong enough to attract the notice of those who were in the house, and instead of descending by the secret passage, they now came thronging out at the front entrance.

"Lights," Steggs cried—"let us have lights, and search! Be quick, for I fear some evil has befallen your mistress!"

Hastily procuring lanterns, the servants hurried towards him, marvelling by what means he could have reached there.

To them his appearance in the garden must have seemed not a little extraordinary and mysterious.

As for Steggs himself, so engrossed was he with dread that some evil had befallen Edgworth Bess, that he never gave the matter a single thought.

When the lights were brought, almost the first thing that attracted their notice was many marks, evidently made by heavy footsteps.

Branches of the shrubs were torn and displaced in many places, and at length they reached a spot where some kind of struggle had evidently taken place.

"I feared this," cried Steggs, finding that his worst forebodings were fully realised—"I feared this. I have arrived too late—she is gone!"

Notwithstanding these ejaculations, the servants searched about them with the lanterns, and presently an ejaculation from one caused all the others to run towards him.

"Some one has gone this way," cried the man. "Look, here are the footprints of two persons!"

Over this soft garden-bed, large heavy footmarks could be seen, but no trace of Edgworth Bess.

"Follow them," said Steggs, almost distracted with grief and terror—"follow them with all speed!"

They did, and found they led to the wall bounding the garden.

On the other side was the high-road, and this was hard and firm, showing no trace whatever.

So here the clue was entirely lost.

There was ample evidence to show that Edgworth Bess had been carried off.

Some persons or other had abducted her.

This was a painful and dreadful conclusion to arrive at.

But there was no escaping the conviction, and Steggs literally groaned aloud.

He was undecided how to act.

Should he, by himself, or with such aid as the servants could give him, commence an immediate pursuit in the hope of coming up with her?

Alas! he feared it would be of slight avail.

Evidently, some time had elapsed, and now the villains would be far enough off.

Some greater power than he possessed would be necessary to overtake her.

But there was a yet more disagreeable conviction in Steggs's mind—yet one that he strove as much as possible to blind himself to.

This was, that Edgworth Bess had been once more seized by Jonathan Wild.

He dared not allow the idea to remain in his mind for a moment.

As quickly as he could, he came to a decision.

"I will ride at once to the Lord Chancellor's," he muttered; "it may be that I shall find him at his country residence; if I do, there will be slight delay, if I don't I must push on towards London."

The horse he had brought was thoroughly fatigued, and so he chose the fleetest there was remaining in the stable.

It was a high-spirited, full-blooded creature, and required no ordinary skill in handling.

"Be careful," said the groom, as Steggs seated himself in the saddle, "he is a regular brute, he is and no mistake, but he can go like the wind."

The man released the horse's head while he spoke, and certainly the manner in which he bounded forward almost justified what he had said.

The speed was truly terrific.

Yet he kept evenly in the middle of the road.

Swiftly as he went, yet the progress made seemed slight or none at all, and every now and then the spur would be applied, although the creature then was going at what might truly be called a headlong pace.

And in this furious passion he rode on until the country house of the Lord Chancellor was reached.

To his vexation and disappointment, he learned he was not there, but in London.

He had no resource but to continue his journey, and without even a moment's further delay than was absolutely necessary, he started off.

The rain began to fall, the thunder to roll, and the lightning to flash.

The storm that had already produced great havoc was sweeping on, and he had ridden into the midst of it.

The half-maddened horse that he bestrode was alarmed beyond measure by the vivid flashes of lightning and the terrific crashes of the thunder.

But, heedless of all, keeping only one object in view, Steggs continued his terrific race.

The rain poured down in perfect torrents, and soaked him through and through to the skin.

But such was the excitement of his feelings that he knew it not.

Suddenly, however, there came a stop and a blank—recollection and sense were suddenly annihilated.

CHAPTER DCCXX.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD HAVE AN INTERVIEW WITH STEGGS, AND LEARN THE DISASTER THAT HAS BEFALLEN EDGORTH BESS.

How the accident happened can scarcely be told.

From some slight cause or other—stepping upon a loose stone probably—the horse stumbled, slipped, and fell.

In his fall he carried his rider with him, and such was the tremendous rate he had been going at, that, without power to save himself, Steggs was flung over the creature's head, and fell with a terrific crash upon the roadway.

Luckily, there happened to be persons sheltering near who saw that something was amiss, and hastened to his assistance.

The horse, scrambling desperately to his feet, bounded off like a mad creature, and was quickly lost to sight.

Steggs was discovered to be quite insensible, if not dead.

A brief discussion took place among those who found him as to what should be done.

At last, however, it was unanimously agreed that a hurdle should be pulled up out of a field, the stranger placed upon it, and carried by them, with all speed, to the nearest inn.

As we have related in a former chapter, this was done, and, by a strange coincidence, the next inn was the one where Blueskin and Jack Sheppard had made their temporary halt.

We have told how they recognised Steggs, and how they wondered what had brought him there.

It will be recollected also that Jack Sheppard's heart was in a moment filled with a foreboding of great danger.

Both were anxious to learn something from their ally, and, in the hope of obtaining an opportunity, they had asked for beds at the inn, and had been accommodated.

When passing upstairs, they had asked, apparently in a casual manner, which was the room into which the insensible stranger had been placed.

It was pointed out at once, and, with an indifferent remark, they passed on.

They were pleased to find the chamber into which they were shown was very close to it, and as soon as they were alone the two friends congratulated themselves upon their good fortune.

"Now, if we wait a little while," said Blueskin, "we shall know all."

"I hope so."

"That is, if Steggs recovers his consciousness. Perhaps he is not hurt so badly, after all."

Some time elapsed; then, finding all around was perfectly still, they went to the door, and, opening it, stood and listened.

No people appeared to be astir, and so, without the least hesitation, they crossed the passage, and entered the room that had been pointed out to them.

A dim light was burning in it, and they could hear some one slumbering heavily.

Going up to the bed, they saw Steggs lying outside of it with his head bandaged up, and a considerable portion of his face concealed.

Yet they were able to recognise him, and to feel quite sure respecting his identity.

"How sound he sleeps!" said Blueskin, in a whisper.

"What are we to do?"

"Wake him," said Jack.

"But suppose the doctor should—as is very likely—have administered some sleeping potion to him, we may then be doing much harm. I propose rather, that we should sit down and wait here patiently until he awakes of his own accord."

"But suppose some one should enter?"

"Why, then we must conceal ourselves."

Although literally burning with impatience, Jack felt that there was no other course that could be pursued that was half so reasonable.

The slumbers in which the senses of Steggs were wrapped was to all appearance just such a one as would follow the administration of a narcotic.

In perfect silence, many hours passed away.

The surgeon, in leaving, told the landlord and his wife that his patient's sleep would last some time, and that he was on no account to be disturbed.

The hurt, he said, although it had produced insensibility, was not by any means a serious one, and probably, when he awoke, he would feel little inconvenience from it.

When they were quite weary with watching, a slight movement on the bed attracted the attention of Jack and Blueskin, and they at once hastened towards it.

Just as they arrived, Steggs opened his eyes widely, and looked wonderingly about him.

He stared hard into their countenances.

But at present his intellects were in a very confused state, for he did not recognise them.

He closed his eyes again, as the two friends thought, to slumber, but in reality it was to endeavour to recall his scattered thoughts.

He was puzzled and bewildered at finding himself in such a strange place, and therefore he tried to think what was the last thing he could recollect.

It was not long before the accident occurred to him.

Although his fall had been so sudden, and the insensibility had succeeded it so quickly that he could scarcely remember anything about it, yet he knew he had met with an accident that had delayed him, and again he opened his eyes.

This time Blueskin spoke.

"Don't start, Steggs, or utter any ejaculation. You are safe and well, and we are with you."

"Blueskin and Jack Sheppard?"

"Yes—yes. But don't, on any account, pronounce that name; if you must speak of him at all, say Jack simply."

"But how is it we have met?" asked Steggs.

"That matters not—the story is not important; you shall know it presently. Tell us why it was you were riding at such a furious pace through that tremendous storm? What urgent matter was occupying your thoughts?"

A groan was the only response, and he started up into a sitting posture.

"Edgorth Bess!" he gasped.

"What," asked Jack, eagerly and excitedly—"what of her?"

"Hush!" said Blueskin—"pray be silent, or we shall be overheard!"

"I have terrible news to tell you," continued Steggs, who had by this time fairly recovered the use of all his faculties—"terrible news, as you will say!"

"What—what? Don't keep us lingering in suspense!"

"I will not. But to-night I made my way to the old Manor House, intending to tell Edgworth Bess that up to the present I had failed in my attempts to capture that diabolical villain, Jonathan Wild."

Jack Sheppard interrupted him with an angry exclamation.

Steggs continued, quickly:

"I was going to tell her that in order to ease her mind and free her from suspense; I was going to tell her, and that up to the present time no accident had befallen either of you."

"Well—well, why do you not go on?"

"I am telling you as fast as I can. But when I arrived, I found that she had disappeared—I was just too late."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes, in a manner most strange and remarkable; the whole occurrence seems to me more like some incoherent dream than reality."

"Tell us—tell us! Don't omit one particular!"

Steggs complied.

He narrated at full length how he had descended through the subterranean passages, and how he had at last emerged into the garden, where, as it seemed to him, she had been seized and carried off.

"I knew it," said Jack, wringing his hands despairingly—"I knew it! I felt certain when I saw you brought in insensible and still that some misfortune had happened to her, and that you were flying for assistance!"

"Yes, you are right. By myself I felt I could do little; but I knew the Lord Chancellor was greatly interested in her, and I knew what tremendous power he could use if he thought proper; I was going to lay a statement of the whole case before him—that, no doubt, is our most likely means of recovering her."

"It is a most disastrous circumstance," said Blueskin, "view it in which way we will. Have you been able to ascertain by whom this had been done?"

Steggs was silent.

"There is no need to ask that question!" cried Jack Sheppard—"the answer is one that is already present to your heart, as it is to mine! It is Jonathan Wild who has wrought all our misery, and now, you see, he has not done! This is a portion, beyond a doubt, of some elaborate scheme of revenge that he has got up, and that poor girl will be the victim!"

"Let us hope for the best," said Steggs. "At any rate, it is not worth while for us to waste any time here in discussion—we must act, not speak!"

"But can you rise? Have you recovered sufficiently from your hurt?"

"I must rise," was the answer, "whether I have or not. I can tell from my feelings that it would not injure me half so much as to remain here in suspense."

"Where should you go?"

"To London, to the Lord Chancellor's, and enlist his aid."

"A good plan, and while you are doing that we will be acting independently ourselves."

"In what way?"

"Describe to us the position of the Manor House, and we will go there. We will search everywhere around, and perhaps shall be successful in discovering a clue."

"But will it not be dangerous to expose yourselves so much?"

"We will use all the precautions we can," was the answer. "In the first place, we will disguise ourselves, and then you must remember that it is such a long time since we did anything to bring ourselves under the notice of the police officers that we are well-nigh forgotten, especially as they are so much occupied in their chase after Jonathan Wild. It is when he is captured that we shall probably be in the most danger."

"Well, well, as you will," said Steggs, slipping from the bed. "My head feels strangely yet; but that feeling will doubtless soon go off. Where is my horse—do you know anything of him?"

"No, I do not—I have not seen him or heard a word."

"Well, I must have a horse from somewhere, and, now I think of it, it is quite possible that you, by going direct to the spot, may learn something important—the clue can hardly be said to have grown cold at present."

"That is exactly my opinion."

"And speed is necessary," said Jack—"the utmost speed—every moment's delay is of more importance than can be expressed. Jonathan Wild has her, I feel convinced."

No answer was made to this assertion, simply because his hearers both shared in the conviction.

"He is a terrible and desperate man; he must feel that he has now almost reached the end of his career. He has seen how everything has failed, and how Tyburn tree is staring him in the face. His state must be of the utmost desperation, and such being the case, who can tell what barbarity or atrocity he may not perpetrate, although knowing that his death must quickly follow, simply from the desire to glut his revenge upon us?"

"I fully share your fears, Jack," cried Steggs. "Let me advise you not to lose another moment in carrying out your purpose. I need not tell you to be vigilant or untiring; I know you will, and as for me, rest assured that I shall, with as little delay as possible, proceed to the Lord Chancellor, and when he takes up the matter, Jonathan's capture must follow, as a matter of course."

"One would think so—one would think so," was the reply.

"I feel quite sure of it."

"But," said Jack Sheppard, "if his capture is only effected after he has wreaked his vengeance on that poor girl it will be but a paltry satisfaction indeed to us then."

"It will—it will. We must hope for the best."

"Come, then," said Steggs, "assist me to descend the stairs. I don't feel competent alone, and I have such a dreadful feeling of weakness upon me."

"And we must arouse the people of the inn," said Blueskin. "They will be surprised, beyond a doubt."

The landlord was astonished; but as Steggs paid him in a most liberal fashion for what had been done he was tolerably content.

Upon inquiry, Steggs found that his horse was gone, and had not since been heard of.

"I must have one," he said, addressing the landlord. "If you have a horse, and a good one, I will purchase it, if not, you must obtain one for me without further loss of time."

CHAPTER DCCXXI.

STEGGS REACHES THE LORD CHANCELLOR'S IN SAFETY, AND PROMPT AND ENERGETIC MEASURES ARE TAKEN TO CAPTURE JONATHAN WILD.

"I HAVE," said the landlord, "one that will suit you admirably!"

"Good. I will purchase it. There need be no time lost about a bargain—bring him round at once!"

"And take some brandy with you," said Blueskin; "you are almost sure to feel exhausted and weak before you have gone far, and a stimulant will do much towards reviving you."

This advice was followed.

The horse was brought round and purchased, and Steggs, with some difficulty, was assisted into the saddle.

"Farewell," he said—"farewell, for a short time only. If I have my strength left you will soon see me again."

And as he spoke, he touched his horse with the spurs, and started off at a headlong gallop along the road.

As the surgeon had said, the hurt was by no means an important one, and the only sensation Steggs felt was one of weakness.

This proceeded more than anything else from the fact that the first thing the surgeon did to his patient was to bleed him.

In those days the lancet was considered to be a sovereign cure for all complaints, and was freely resorted to.

Consequently, every now and then, Steggs would experience a frightful sensation of weakness.

His brain would spin round, and such a mist would float before his eyes that he would be unable to see anything.

The giddiness, too, that seized upon him made it exceedingly difficult for him to retain his seat in the saddle.

But his mind was so fully occupied with one idea, and he was so fully impressed with the importance of the errand he was going upon, that it enabled him to overcome those sensations, which otherwise might have grown strong enough to keep him back altogether.

The journey he had to perform was a long one.

But it was performed in safety.

By the time he arrived within sight of London, however, his strength was all but spent.

From time to time he applied himself to the brandy, and although the spirit at first refreshed him exceedingly, and revived his failing energies, yet, in a short time, by repeated doses, it lost its effect.

At the last moment he began to grow apprehensive as to whether he should be able to reach the Lord Chancellor's residence.

When he drew near to the metropolis it was daylight.

Although the hour was early, many people were abroad, and those who saw him turned to look upon him with an inquiring eye.

His head was strangely and somewhat hideously bandaged up.

The rapid motion had caused the hurt to begin to bleed again, so that the linen was stained crimson in many places.

His face, also, was ghastly pale, resembling in all respects that of a corpse.

To his great joy, about half an hour afterwards, he reined up in front of the Lord Chancellor's residence.

Dismounting he found to be a difficult process.

His legs appeared to be as heavy as lead, and the muscles in them to be wholly beyond his control.

In getting down, he slipped and fell upon the roadway.

But a stranger passing by, assisted him to rise.

"My good man," he said, "you appear to be in a very terrible state, and not at all fit to be journeying like this. How is it?"

"I am not fit," said Steggs, faintly, "but the end of my journey is now reached. Many—many thanks for your assistance! Would you still further increase the obligation by helping me to ascend those steps, and by knocking loudly at the door?"

The man to whom these words were addressed stared in the utmost surprise.

"Don't refuse me," said Steggs, noticing his behaviour, "the business I have come upon is most important."

The man hesitated a second; then, taking hold of Steggs, he assisted him to mount the steps, and knocked loudly at the door, as he had been requested.

The Lord Chancellor's mansion had a most imposing appearance, and the man who had come so opportunely to Steggs's assistance ascended them with a kind of awe.

No sooner had he knocked than he appeared to repent of the temerity of such a proceeding, so he hastily ran down the steps again, and crossed the road, determined to be out of the reach of the doorkeeper's vengeance.

Certainly the footman who responded to the summons looked rather aghast when he saw such a horrible-looking object standing on the threshold.

Steggs had to support himself by clutching the doorpost.

"Tell his lordship I am here," he gasped—"be quick! Tell him, too, the business is most urgent! I am Steggs; tell him my name, and he will see me."

The footman knew Steggs well enough, though at first he had not recognised him.

He knew, also, that the Lord Chancellor had some private business transactions with him, therefore he did not scruple to deliver the message that had been given him.

According to expectation, his lordship at once desired that Steggs might be sent into him.

He was not a little astonished and alarmed when he witnessed his condition.

He was full of regret as well, for he had known Steggs

long enough to be aware of his very good qualities and his fidelity.

In a few words as possible, Steggs made the Lord Chancellor aware of what had taken place at the Manor House.

At first his lordship was incredulous.

It seemed out of all character that anyone should have the audaciousness to perform such an act.

"My lord," said Steggs, feebly, "there is only one man who would have thought of or attempted to carry out such a project, and that man is Jonathan Wild!"

"But he has half the police of London on his track."

"No matter," said Steggs; "I feel as well assured that he has done this as I should if I had actually witnessed it."

His lordship smiled.

"I should be inclined to attribute it to some other person—it seems out of all question that Jonathan Wild, circumstanced as he is, should have attempted such a thing. He must know what would be the consequences of such an act."

"Just so," said Steggs, "and that is precisely why he would do it."

"How so?"

"He knows that his life is forfeited already, and that no matter what enormity he may commit, no more can be done to him than is contemplated at present. He knows the worst: the most that can be done to him is to hang him."

"It may be so," said the Chancellor, musingly—"at any rate, we will have the affair thoroughly investigated. As for Jonathan Wild, it is a disgrace to the whole country to think that he has remained so long uncaptured. I will see that fresh men are sent after him, and that all the rewards offered for him shall be doubled, so that we shall be doing two things at the same time. If I find that he has been concerned in this abduction, no mercy shall be shown him."

"He expects none," said Steggs, "and therefore he is truly desperate."

"Well, well—at any rate, we may make up our minds that he has reached the end of his tether at last—his race is over—he is doomed."

"I trust you will succeed," said Steggs. "I have had hate to nerve me and to urge me on, yet, you see, I have failed; there are others, too, who have joined in the pursuit from the same feelings, and they have also accomplished nothing."

"It is strange indeed," replied the Chancellor—"I cannot understand how it is that he can baffle you all."

"We have been searching for him in the wrong place, my lord—that's the secret of the matter; we ought to have been watching round the Manor House instead of riding miles away from it. I can see my error now; but it is too late."

"Well, don't regret it; things have now come to a crisis. Calm yourself as well as you can; I will give my instructions immediately, and see that they are carried out. You retire, and obtain the rest and assistance that you must urgently need; the sooner you recover the better."

"I am well aware of that, my lord."

"And Jonathan Wild," continued the Lord Chancellor, "shall find that there is a limit even to his daring—he shall be made to know that he cannot brave me with impunity. I will cause such a concentration of men around him that if he had a thousand lives he would perish! Now go, and leave the rest to me."

Steggs obeyed unhesitatingly, for the advice given him was good, and he was fully impressed with the knowledge that the sooner he recovered his usual health the better it would be in all respects.

As for the Lord Chancellor's promises, he had every possible faith in them.

He knew how much he had become attached to the poor orphan during the time she had been beneath his roof, and how deeply he sympathised with her on account of the persecutions to which she had been subjected by Jonathan Wild.

No sooner had Steggs departed than his lordship summoned his secretary, and issued the necessary instructions.

"Mind," he said, with an impressive voice, "I must have this done! I have said it—now attend!"

The secretary retired, and within a short time afterwards those bills that were out offering rewards for Jonathan Wild were replaced by others in which the amount was doubled.

Rewards also were offered for the apprehension of the persons who had carried off Edgworth Bess, and the police authorities received an intimation of such a powerful kind that it set them all on the alert.

Stimulated by this, and by the prospect of obtaining such a large reward, and anxious, too, for their own credit, that it should no longer be said Jonathan Wild could set them at defiance, the police officers, to the number of about thirty, collected into a troop, half of them going in the direction of the old Manor House, and half towards the place where Jonathan Wild had last been heard of.

Surely that bold, bad man and his no-better son would have trembled with dread and apprehension could they but have known what resolute measures were being taken against them.

They would have given up all those schemes of vengeance which had filled their minds, and would, with the least possible delay, have taken effectual steps for leaving England at once and for ever.

Surely such a combination could not be set entirely at defiance.

Although they had failed so many times, and Jonathan had had so many miraculous escapes, yet now it was scarcely possible for them to fail again.

CHAPTER DCCXXII

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD SET OUT FOR THE OLD MANOR HOUSE, TO ENDEAVOUR TO RECOVER EDGORTH BESS.

No words of ours—no description, however laboured, could convey to the reader any idea of the effect that this disastrous intelligence produced upon Jack Sheppard.

It may be compared in its results to a hard blow upon the brain that would have annihilated all sensation.

And then, after a time, that numbed feeling would pass away, and would be succeeded by the most intolerable and racking pain.

Just so it was with Jack.

When he first heard the dire intelligence that Steggs communicated, his mind was stunned, and, as it were, half deadened.

But in a short time afterwards, as reflection gradually came back, and as he was able to think over all the circumstances, his feelings were indeed terrible in the extreme.

He was wrought up to the highest pitch of frenzy and excitement, nor was his companion, Blueskin, much calmer.

Jack had almost lost all control over himself, and Blueskin saw and felt that the only means by which they might both, to some extent, regain their lost composure, was by mounting their steeds without delay, and galloping off in the direction of the Manor House.

This they at once set about.

The reckoning was paid, the horses brought out, and they mounted.

From Steggs they had received a most accurate description of the Manor House, and had been instructed as to the nearest and best way to it, so that they started off along the highway with great confidence.

Feeling only their own impatience, the horses, although going at a tremendous speed, seemed to be no more than crawling over the ground, and so they whipped and spurred them savagely.

Nor would they allow them to slacken their speed even for an instant, no matter what obstacles were in the way.

The poor creatures were not even allowed a moment's breathing time upon ascending a steep hill.

The consequence was, that in a short time they were utterly knocked up.

At last they became both insensible to the effects of both spur and whip.

They had no longer the power to proceed at a faster rate than a walk.

Great was the vexation and disappointment of both when this unwelcome and unlooked-for discovery was made.

"It's no good repining," said Blueskin. "The fault is ours, and ours only. We have suffered ourselves to be too much led away by our impatience. If we had acted with common caution and discretion, the horses would have held out much longer."

But Jack Sheppard could not look at the occurrence in so calm and philosophical a light.

He was fuller than ever with angry impatience.

"What precious moments we are losing now," he said; "who can tell what the poor girl may be suffering at this moment? Some means of progression must be found. What shall we do?"

"Make the best of it," was the reply. "Chafing and fretting will do no good."

"I know that, Blueskin, and I am glad that you are with me."

"Let us take our horses at such speed as they can make along this road until we come to an inn, or some other place where we can obtain fresh horses. Although ours are now so frightfully knocked up, yet, after a day or two's rest, they will be as right as ever."

"They are of good quality, I know," said Jack: "we have tested them severely."

"We have."

"Well, what were you going to say?"

"Simply this: I believe I have money enough left to enable me to exchange these two we have for two others that would be fresh and vigorous."

"Then let it be done," said Jack. "We should then be able to make better progress; I cannot be calm without my horse is going at the top of his speed."

"We must go gently for a while, at all events," said Blueskin, "and while we are going, we can talk over this accident—if accident we may call it—and come to a conclusion."

"What can we say? What conclusion can we arrive at?"

"I don't know; but if you will remember, we have had no conversation yet upon the subject; at the inn we had no opportunity, and since we left it we have been galloping so fast that talking has been out of the question."

"So it has—so it has."

"Well, then, do you still feel sure that Jonathan Wild is the author of this wrong?"

"I feel quite certain of it."

"Nor have I the least doubt myself. And now let us consider what might be his motive."

"Revenge," said Jack, quickly.

"Most likely; but what kind of revenge? It strikes me, from the position he is now in, that Wild would endeavour to make his revenge subservient to his interests."

"I scarcely understand you!"

"Well, then, it is in this way. He must feel that he cannot carry on much longer. As he is, he must feel that he is in a net, and that the meshes are growing tighter and tighter."

"What is your idea, then?"

"Why, supposing that he has seized and captured Edgworth Bess, as we suppose, I don't think that he would attempt any harm of any description against her."

"Why not—why not?"

"Because he would feel assured that by so doing he would only be precipitating his own doom."

"But would he care for that?"

"I think he would, when he could see that he had means in his hands of averting it."

"Averting it?"

"Yes; he might think so. Suppose he should have seized Edgworth Bess as a kind of hostage, he would keep her somewhere quite secure but unharmed, and he would endeavour to make terms for her restoration. Do you begin to see now?"

"I think I do."

"You must remember, Jack, that in times past I knew much of Jonathan, and was able to tell just how he would reason upon any subject, and that's what makes me more confident that what I have just stated is correct."

"It may be so," said Jack, thoughtfully, "and yet, on the other hand—"

"It may not; therefore, let us look the worst in the face, and be prepared accordingly."

"That's what I should prefer."

"And so should I, by all means. But, then, supposing

for a moment that he has taken Edgworth Bess to some secure and secret place, and that he sent forth a message in some way to the effect that if he was paid a certain sum of money and allowed a chance of making his escape, or upon conditions that the sentence against him was commuted to banishment from England for ever, he would deliver her up unhurt; but, on the other hand, should they refuse, as his position was so bad that it could not bemade worse, he would, in the event of the refusal, put her to death?"

"I see—I see."

"Well, now, in the event of something of this kind coming to pass, in what way should you feel disposed to act?"

"I cannot reply to that question offhand," said Jack—"it is one that would require a great deal of consideration."

"But yet you would do much to have Edgworth Bess restored in safety?"

"I would—I would."

"But could you forego all your schemes and hopes of revenge upon the man who has caused all of us such life-long misery?—could you be content to feel that he had escaped scot-free after perpetrating all those offences?"

"I could not—I could not," said Jack, bitterly; "nothing but his death upon the scaffold will ever satisfy me."

"Well, then, in that case we must decide one way or the other. I fancy that if you were compelled to sacrifice either the life of Edgworth Bess or your revenge, and that you were compelled to do either one or the other, you would not hesitate."

"I should not," said Jack; "but yet I think I should try first whether I could not succeed by other means. I could never bear the thought of yielding in such a way to him."

"It would be galling, of course. But look! If I mistake not, yonder is a public-house. I hope we shall be able to find the accommodation at it that we require."

The sight of this resting-place seemed to put fresh vigour into Jack Sheppard, and into the horses too, for they mended their pace slightly.

"As we continue to ride along," said Blueskin, "we can think over all these things in our minds, and so be prepared to come to a decision, should the necessity arise."

"Yes, you are right there; but if Jonathan Wild has really carried off Edgworth Bess, I shall try first of all whether I cannot capture him, and so render any deep-laid plans that he may have laid of no avail."

"But do you not feel less apprehensive about the personal safety of Edgworth Bess than you did a little while ago?"

"I confess I do, and for that alone I owe you many thanks."

"Don't mention it."

"I can see," continued Jack, "that if Jonathan has her in his power he would have everything to lose and nothing to gain by taking her life. He will try, first of all, what he can accomplish in the way of stratagem."

"He will. And look, Jack—there's the inn. It looks a large one, and, by the trough in front of the door, and the bundle of straw that I can see hanging yonder, I should say it is very probable we shall be able to obtain a couple of horses there."

In this hope they pushed on.

When they arrived, they saw the landlord standing in front of the house, and near him was another man, who was leading a horse by the halter.

He said something to the landlord, and then, taking a firmer grasp of the rope, began to run the horse, running by the side of him.

Then he returned to his former position, and the conversation was continued.

"That horse is for sale, I feel pretty sure," said Blueskin. "Come, come, Jack—luck is going to befriend us after all."

At this moment they stopped in front of the inn, and the landlord, seeing they were customers, hastened towards them.

"We don't want to stop," said Jack, "but our horses, as you see, are quite knocked up. We have ridden them a great many miles, at a rapid rate, without stopping. We want to know whether you can furnish us with two

others of good quality in exchange. Our business is most urgent—every moment is of the greatest importance."

Hearing this, the landlord thought he should be able to do a good thing in two ways.

He might buy the horse which had just been offered to him at a low price, and part with him again to these strangers at a considerable advance.

This thought struck him in a moment, and he smiled and rubbed his hands quite pleasantly.

"I have no doubt I can accommodate you, gentlemen; but as it will take a minute or two, be good enough to dismount and walk indoors—I will be with you immediately."

"Come," said Blueskin—"we are both hot and thirsty, and a draught of ale will revive us both. Come."

They entered the inn, and the landlord completed his purchase.

Having done so, he called Jack and Blueskin to him, and then showed them the horse he had just bought, and another that he fetched from the stable.

They were neither of them very handsome, but they seemed capable of making good speed, and, what was more, they also seemed possessed of considerable powers of endurance.

Blueskin was not long in making the purchase, and in a very short space of time Jack Sheppard and himself were riding at a rattling speed along the road towards the old Manor House.

CHAPTER DCCXXIII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ARRIVE AT THE OLD MANOR HOUSE, AND FIND THAT IN ONE RESPECT AT LEAST THEY WERE COMPLETELY MISTAKEN.

CONSIDERABLY more than half the distance from the inn to the old Manor House was already accomplished, and as they were mounted upon two good steeds, there was every prospect of their arriving within a short time.

No more conversation was exchanged between them, for their rate of travelling made it impossible.

But both were thinking busily over the whole affair, so as to be in perfect readiness when the time of action came.

They were also undecided as to their exact method of procedure upon arriving at the Manor House.

Should they commence their investigations at the summer-house, or should they enter the building itself?

The more Jack thought over this, the more inclined he felt to come to the latter determination, and presently, checking his horse, he put the question to his comrade:

"Does it not strike you as being singular," he said, "that she should have left her chamber in so mysterious a way, and, without any apparent object, have descended into those mysterious passages?"

"It does seem strange," replied Blueskin.

"It is so strange, that I can scarcely believe it at all," continued Jack. "I have quite another idea upon the subject."

"Why?"

"I am inclined to think that by some strange means or other Jonathan Wild may have become acquainted with the fact that there was a secret passage leading from the disused summer-house into the mansion itself."

Blueskin started.

"I had not thought of that before, Jack," he exclaimed, "but now it comes upon me with the full force of a conviction. That must be it. And that Jonathan Wild should be aware of the existence of such a place is not at all surprising."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Can you forget how many dealings he has had with Abel Donnull, and what opportunities he has had of looking everywhere about him? You ought to know well that Jonathan never goes anywhere with his eyes shut. He at some time or other either found it out, or else was told of it."

"Then, in that case," said Jack, "he would avail himself of this knowledge, traverse those secret passages, enter the room, and carry off Edgworth Bess in the dead of night."

"Depend upon it that's it," said Blueskin, "and now



[BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD SEARCHING FOR EDGWORTH BESS.]

that enables me to decide something I have been in doubt about."

"What is that?"

"Whether we should present ourselves at the Manor House, and begin our search in the room where Edgworth Bess was last seen. It is now imperatively necessary that we should do so."

"It is indeed; and as we have come to this conclusion, let us push on again at a gallop. Surely we have not much further to go."

Accordingly, their horses were once more urged onward, nor did they slacken speed again until they reached the summit of a hill."

"That must be the place!" said Jack Sheppard, with a cry of satisfaction, and pointing in advance. "It corresponds exactly with the description that Steggs gave."

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"It does—it does!"

"Oh, yes, I feel sure that we are right. It is a noble, pleasant-looking building."

"Yes, I can remember it well in the happy days gone by; but it is so long ago, that I had almost forgotten. Now all comes back to me again."

"And how strange those trees look yonder," said Jack, still pointing. "They seem almost as if they were growing on a hill."

"They have that appearance," said Blueskin. "There is a steep hill there, and so steep, and so thickly covered with vegetation of all kinds, that it is scarcely possible to penetrate it. I remember now that in former times the poachers made it their head-quarters."

Strangely enough, the hill to which Jack pointed was the very one that Jonathan Wild and his son had reached, as we have described in a former chapter, and in the

caverns beneath which they had had such singular adventures.

"Come," said Blueskin, "there is no more to be seen; and as we are to enter the house, the more speedy we are in our proceedings the better, as we may look for the appearance of the police officers almost every moment."

"True."

At a rapid gallop they made their way to the ancient edifice.

They stopped abruptly at the chief entrance, and flung themselves from their horses.

Only the servants were there, and Jack said:

"We have come direct from London to inquire into the disappearance of your mistress. Show us at once the room where she was left last."

It did not occur to them for a moment to question either Jack or Blueskin as to their authority, but, in a moment, complied with their request.

They were conducted upstairs to the turret chamber.

A strange room for Edgworth Bess to occupy; but neither Jack nor Blueskin wondered at it, for Steggs had informed them of her motive.

It was that she might watch for their approach.

Nothing in the room had been disturbed.

It had been judged best that every object should be left just in the state they found it.

Although they searched narrowly around, neither Jack nor Blueskin found anything in the chamber itself to justify the theory they had formed.

There were no evidences of violence anywhere.

Then, having obtained lights, they began to descend the staircase.

They reached the bottom in a few moments, and entered a spacious, disused room.

Here their lights were not of much service, for it was the fair and glorious daylight without; and although the windows of the room were thickly incrustated with the dirt and dust of many years, yet, through the darkened panes, sufficient illumination came to enable them to see well all around.

It was at this time that Blueskin discovered that everywhere they went they left clear and surely-defined footmarks behind them.

He communicated the fact to his companion.

"Look, Jack," he said, "there's where Edgworth Bess has gone, certainly enough. You can see every foot-print quite plainly. We have made a mistake, for, as you see, there are no other footprints near."

Jack paused at once.

He could scarcely realise the truth of this.

"Look," continued Blueskin, walking on before him, "every footprint has been firmly and regularly taken. Depend upon it she was not forced along this way; she's gone voluntarily. Certainly no one else has accompanied her. Approach and satisfy yourself."

Jack did approach, and examined the footmarks narrowly.

Then he was forced to come to the conclusion that he had made a mistake.

"No," he said, "we were wrong there, certainly; and being wrong, how can we tell that we are not greatly in error in our other conclusions?"

"We may be," said Blueskin; "and yet I think not. Perhaps Steggs was aware of all this, although he did not mention it."

"But how extraordinary it is," cried Jack, "that she should have left her chamber in such a manner, and taken so peculiar a route. What object could she have?"

"That puzzles me," said Blueskin, "but I trust we shall be able to find it out some time. At present, however, it is quite clear that we can only continue in our present course, and watch her footmarks narrowly."

This was quite evident, and they passed through the disused room, and down the staircase to the subterranean passage.

In the soft mud the footprints could be more easily distinguished, and by the side of them could be seen those that had been made by Steggs.

In this way the whole of the passage was traversed.

The dungeon was examined, and her presence there seemed more inexplicable than all the rest.

Then, coming at last to the flight of steps at the other end, they ascended, and found themselves in the old summer-house.

"Some force has been used to break down this partition," said Jack. "Can it be possible that she has done it?"

"I don't know; it almost defies conjecture."

"True. It does not look very firm. Perhaps a touch was all that was necessary to remove it."

"It is as rotten as tinder," was the reply. "A child could have forced its way through."

They looked on the floor of the summer-house, hoping to find other footmarks.

But were disappointed.

From time to time a quantity of dry leaves had been blown by the wind into the place, and had piled themselves to a great depth upon the floor.

And on these yielding objects no impression of a footprint could be traced.

Outside, however, they again saw the footprints, but they were mingled up with others.

Then they came to the spot that Steggs had described to them, and, upon examination, they came to his conclusion—namely, that a struggle had taken place there.

"We were quite wrong," said Blueskin, "in our ideas respecting Jonathan Wild. We have gained nothing by our search so far."

"True," said Jack, in a tone of regret. "We have nothing more now to guide us than we had at first. Why she should have quitted so strangely I know not; but I am afraid we must conclude that she found her way into the garden, and then was seen by her enemy, pounced upon, struggled with, and captured."

"Yes, and he must have raised her in his arms," added Blueskin, "for you see we can trace her footsteps no further."

"No; but he had a companion with him. Do you see that?"

"Yes, his son George, beyond a doubt."

The footprints were followed to the wall, and then, of course, as Steggs had stated, all further trace was lost.

The hard, well-travelled road afforded them not the slightest clue.

"We are here," said Jack, at last, "with one consolation, and with one certain knowledge: they have brought her so far, but which way they may have turned is impossible to guess. We will let chance direct us, and keep going round in a circle, increasing the circumference of it every time. Perhaps, before we have gone far, we may fall in with the track again."

"It is most likely," said Blueskin; "and the plan you have proposed is the very best that could be followed. That's how good hounds will do when they have lost the scent of the fox; they will return to the last place, and then wheel round and round in circles until they come upon it again."

"And so will we," said Jack; "and let us hope that before long our anxiety will be at an end, and that we shall succeed in wresting her from the villain's power."

"I hope so," said Blueskin. "First of all, however, we will fetch our horses from where we left them, and then commence our investigations."

This was done, and once more mounting, the two friends commenced what certainly looked like their hopeless task.

CHAPTER DCCXXIV.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON MEET WITH A FRESH SURPRISE IN THE CAVERNS.

WE now revert to the proceedings of Jonathan Wild and his son, who, as will be remembered, we last left in that singular-looking cavern.

The deep-laid and cold-blooded attempt that the robbers—if such they were—had made upon their lives had signally failed.

The tables had been completely turned, and they had fallen into the snare they had laid for others.

At Wild junior's suggestion, the men, although presenting no signs of life, had been carefully bound with some rope that had been found in one corner.

This being done, they fully believed that they were perfectly secure, and had no further interruption to apprehend.

"Come," said Wild junior, "we will not waste any time; let us commence at once to make a thorough search

around. It will be impossible for us to get too well acquainted with the intricacies of these caverns."

To this Jonathan at once assented, though it was plain, from the manner in which he spoke and moved, that much of his old vigour had departed.

It was almost in a mechanical way that he followed in the footsteps of his son.

A small fissure in the side of the cavern quickly attracted their attention, and George Wild at once proceeded to rigidly examine it.

It was both high and wide enough to allow him to enter it.

But before he had gone three paces he was compelled to pause.

To all appearance there was no further passage.

It was merely an indentation in the rock and nothing more.

He perceived, however, that near the ground there was a low arch, yet sufficiently large to allow anyone to crawl under it easily.

He at once set the example of doing this, and disappeared from Jonathan's gaze almost instantly.

"Come here, guv'nor," he cried, a moment afterwards—"come here, it's all right, and I think you will be surprised at what you see."

Jonathan crawled under the archway, and found that its length did not exceed a couple of feet.

Assuming a standing position, he then found himself in a small-sized cavern or chamber.

The height, however, seemed prodigious, and, doubtless through some small opening in the roof, a small portion of the light of day penetrated, and rendered all objects in its interior visible.

"This is what I call a nice, snug little place, guv'nor," said George, "and I'll tell you how we can make it of great service to us."

"How?"

"Why, we will pick up those fellows that we have left in the large cavern outside, and push them one by one under the arch."

"I see."

"Then when we have disposed of them all," continued George, "we will get a large fragment of rock and roll it close up to the arch, or, if possible, wedge it in so that there can be no possibility of them coming out."

"And after all," added Jonathan, "we have no certain knowledge that they are dead; they may be only stupefied from the effects of the drug."

"I hardly think it, guv'nor; but yet it is best to be on the sure side. I can't help fancying that they intended to put an end to us at once by poison."

"Or," said Jonathan, "they may have intended to drug us first, and when we were perfectly helpless, to have deprived us of our lives in some other fashion."

"Well, if we carry out this suggestion of mine, it will not matter—either way we shall be making sure."

"So we shall—so we shall."

"Will you help me, then?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Back then to the other cavern, and let us begin without any further loss of time."

George Wild himself led the way to the outer cavern, saying as he did so:

"You remain just here, guv'nor, and as I push them through, you take hold of them and drag them aside."

This was done, and a considerable space of time was thus occupied.

But at length the last member of that strange, secret band, was carried by George Wild to the orifice in the rock, and then pushed through into the inner cavern.

Jonathan felt rather nervous about remaining in his present position.

His alarm was perfectly groundless, but yet he had his suspicions of his son's fidelity, and not without good reason.

In the present instance, George showed no symptoms of an intention to play him false, although the speed with which Jonathan made his way from the inner to the outer cavern rather astonished him.

"Why, guv'nor," he said, "what in the world is the matter?"

"Matter?"

"Yes."

"Nothing at all."

"Well, curse me if I didn't think all those fellows had come to life again, and that you had bolted out to escape them."

"No—no, George," said Jonathan, with a sickly kind of smile, "it was nothing of that sort, and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"I confess I didn't feel very comfortable staying there, and I was heartily glad when the job was over."

"Well, well, we have nearly done; but, guv'nor."

"What?"

"You must help me to roll that large stone yonder; if we can manage to get it here, its weight will be so great that those within, even if they should be in a position to make the attempt, would never be able to remove it."

"It is too large, George."

"No, no—not a bit; put out your strength, guv'nor, and we shall move it."

It was a very large fragment of rock to which George Wild alluded, and it was no wonder that Jonathan should have some misgivings as to the possibility of moving it.

Wild junior, however, having made up his mind, put forth his utmost strength, and the stone was rolled over.

The progress made was very slow, and the labour required, immense.

But they persevered, and eventually succeeded in accomplishing their object.

The last roll was given to the stone, and then, as they had hoped and anticipated, it wedged itself tightly into the fissure of the rock in such a manner as to defy removal from either side.

"Well, now we have done so much," said George, "I think we can afford to rest awhile and recover our breath a little."

"I am very sorry," was the reply.

"You seem quite down-hearted, guv'nor, but I'm sure you ought not. Success awaits us—I can feel a presentiment to that effect."

"I wish I could feel as I used to in days gone by," said Jonathan, in tones of deep regret, "but somehow I seem already to be half dead."

"Nonsense."

"It is a fact, and, strive against the feeling as I may, it obtains the mastery over me. I cannot conquer it."

"But you will do, guv'nor," said George, in a hopeful voice. "I don't wonder at your feeling the effects of all that you have gone through since your escape from Newgate; but by this one bold stroke that we are about to make we shall secure wealth and perfect immunity for the past."

"I hope so, George—I hope so; but I have my doubts."

"Then discard them. Live on and hope to the last. I believe yet that fortune will so far favour us as to enable us to obtain a full revenge upon all our enemies."

"We shall see, George—we shall see, but——"

"But what?"

"We have failed so very often, that, as I tell you, I have lost all confidence."

"Pooh—pooh! you are a little out of sorts; but a change will soon be manifest; the success that I am sure awaits us will quite restore you to yourself, and make you feel as you felt of old."

Jonathan was silent.

He sat down upon one of the rude seats in the cavern, and buried his face in his hands.

Wild junior was weary with all his exertions, and therefore he sat down also.

"A little rest won't hurt us, guv'nor; but we want something to drink."

"Yes, brandy; but where are we to obtain it?"

"I don't know, for we shall be all the time in doubt and dread as to whether it was genuine or not."

"We should—we should!"

There was again a deep silence in that strange-looking, subterranean cavern.

Dark thoughts were flitting through the brains of both.

George Wild was looking forward with confidence and security to the results of the step that they were about to take.

To him, the whole thing seemed simple in the extreme, and to bear upon it the unmistakable impress of success.

All that was requisite now was to turn the subject over carefully in their minds, and devise some particular mode of action that would be most likely to bring about the ends they desired.

Jonathan, on the contrary, seemed to have lost all heart for the enterprise.

The thoughts that were passing through his mind were of an entirely different nature.

They were gloomy in the highest degree.

The disagreeable conviction pressed upon him and continued to grow in force that the end of his mortal career was approaching, and that his doom would soon be sealed.

It was rather strange that he should have had this impression, considering the favourable aspect that things wore.

It seemed as though he had some inward monitor that warned him of the approach of danger long before it could be either seen or expected.

When we consider the state of anxiety and suspense he had been in ever since the time of his first capture, and the severe injuries to which he had been subjected, who could wonder that the effects should show themselves even in such an iron constitution as he possessed?

He was, in fact, at that time weary of his life, and could death have come upon him in some sudden annihilating form he would have been rejoiced.

As it was, he had not the courage to contemplate death.

The subject was one from which he resolutely averted his eyes.

And yet they kept all the time turning to it.

When he asked himself what he had to live for he was perforce compelled to answer "Nothing," and yet, with the strange perversity of human nature, he clung to life as though it was the most desirable of all possessions.

And in this manner some time elapsed.

Being each wrapped in a deep reverie, one did not notice the abstraction of the other.

It is hard to say how long they might have remained accuoping just these positions; but suddenly a sound came upon their ears, that brought them face to face with the realities of the present simultaneously, and, as if governed by one impulse, both Jonathan Wild and his son sprang to their feet and listened.

At some distance off, but coming from what direction they could scarcely tell, they could hear the hoarse murmur of voices, the trampling of footsteps, indicating the approach of many persons, who were at no pains to keep their presence a secret.

CHAPTER DCCXXV

GEORGE WILD HITS UPON AN EXCELLENT EXPEDIENT FOR DISPERSING HIS FOES, AND PUTS IT INTO EXECUTION.

NOTHING probably could have startled Wild and his son more than this unexpected occurrence.

It was now wonderful that at first they should jump immediately to the conclusion that those they heard were no other than police officers.

In that case their situation would be perilous in the extreme.

One thing, however, was quite certain: let those who were approaching be whom they might, they were certainly no friends, but enemies.

There was only one mode by which the two Wilds could greet them, and that was a hostile one.

"Guv'nor," said Wild junior, "we are attacked, and if we can do nothing else, we will sell our lives dearly! Stand by me, and we will dare them to do their worst!"

"But a great many are coming," rejoined Jonathan. "How can we hope to contend against so many?"

"We must do the best we can."

"But opposition is madness!"

"Would you, then, give in—surrender without striking a blow?"

"No, certainly not. Such a thing never entered into my thoughts at all."

"What do you mean, then? Quick—let us decide what we are to do, or they will be upon us!"

"Let us hide!"

"Hide? But where?"

"Anywhere."

"We ought to have examined this place more closely."

"But surely there are indentations in the rock where we may conceal ourselves?"

"A good thought," said George. "We will, then, watch the progress of events; we can but come to a fight after all."

"Come, then, quick—quick, or we shall be seen!"

"This way," said George. "I can see a place that will suit us admirably."

He hastened across the cavern as he spoke, towards what looked like a means of communication with some inner chamber.

This indeed was what it was, and scarcely had they gained it and squeezed themselves into it, than a confused and tumultuous throng of persons entered the cavern.

The very first glance that Wild and his son gave at these new-comers sufficed to dispel a very great deal of their apprehension.

They were evidently not police officers—they were satisfied of that at the very first glance.

Nor did it take them any longer to come to a conclusion that they formed some portion of the band which had taken up its quarters in the caverns.

In their general aspect there was a close resemblance to the others, whose treachery had fallen so heavily upon their own heads.

George did not venture to speak, but just pressed Jonathan on the arm.

He understood at once what was meant by the pressure.

The question now was how they should act in the present emergency.

The men who had entered numbered in all twelve or fourteen.

In a contest the odds would be rather too great to afford Jonathan and his son the least chance of success, however desperate they might be.

It was possible, however, that they might escape unseen.

"I told you there was something amiss," said one of the men, who had just entered the cavern—"I knew it—I felt sure of it."

"But what—but what?"

"That's just what puzzles me to find out. Where is our captain, and where are all his followers?"

The men glanced round and saw that the cavern was perfectly empty.

"This seems very strange," said another voice—"it passes belief. Are you sure that you never left your post at the entrance, and that no one has passed out?"

"I am ready to take oath to it any moment."

Upon hearing this, the men all shrank close together.

Some indefinable fear attacked them all at the same moment.

"Tell us again, Jim," said another—"tell us again all that has taken place while we have been absent."

The man thus called upon entered into a minute description of the manner in which Jonathan Wild and his son had made their appearance, and how they had been greeted by the band.

He stated that he had watched the two strangers and all the rest pass down the passage into the cavern, and that since then he had been sitting at the entrance keeping guard.

He then described how one of their number had arrived late, and had also entered.

His surprise was then excited by the fact that no one had been sent to relieve him at his post.

Such an occurrence was quite unusual, and the longer he stayed the more puzzled he became.

He had listened once or twice very intently, but had failed to catch a single sound.

"I don't know how it was, mates," he said, "I had no particular cause for it, but I felt all the time quite confident that something was going wrong—that there was something amiss, and now, then, let me ask you what has become of the captain and all the rest?"

"And of the two strangers also?" said another voice.

"Yes, just so. You know as well as I do that this cavern would not be wholly deserted as it is now except under very special circumstances; but, then, how was it that no one came to take my place at the entrance? You know how strict the captain always is, and why should he have omitted his usual precautions on this occasion?"

"I don't know," said one; "it may be, from some cause or other, he has thought fit to go into some other portion of the caverns."

"Well, it may be, and yet who knows what may have happened?"

"I can't think anything very dreadful," was the reply.

"What could two men do against so many?"

The first speaker shook his head.

"Well, in such a case as this," cried one, who had not hitherto spoken, "should we not be justified in ringing the bell?"

"I don't know. Perhaps we should be interfering with some of the captain's plans."

"By all means let it be tried," cried the one who had acted as sentinel. "I feel so certain in my own mind that something terrible has taken place that I am willing to take the entire responsibility of giving that important summons—so here goes!"

"But stay," said another—"don't be rash."

The sentinel, who had seized hold of a rope that was hanging at one side of the cavern, paused.

"You know the rules about that bell. We have all been expressly forbidden to touch it, except, indeed, that something terrible should occur—such as a total defeat, or the discovery of our place of refuge, or something of that sort."

"I know all about that," said the sentinel; "but still where is the captain, and where are all the rest?"

"It is very strange."

"Strange indeed! And rather than remain in this suspense, I tell you I will ring the bell, and never mind the consequences—I tell you again I will take them all upon myself."

While speaking, this man tugged at the rope violently, and then a loud clanging peal arose that seemed to fill up every nook and corner in the caverns.

The sound was so loud and so continuous as to become almost deafening.

"There—there," cried several voices—"that will do—that will do!"

"I think it will," said the sentinel; "and now then, if the captain or any of his men are here, we shall see them very shortly make their appearance—no matter how they are engaged, that signal will bring them."

"You are right enough there."

"Well, then," cried the sentinel, "stand still for a few moments and listen."

He was obeyed, and these rough-looking lawless men stood in various picturesque attitudes, with an expression of great expectation upon their countenances.

That expression soon changed its character to one of apprehension.

The last echoes of the loud-clanging bell died away, but the deep silence that then prevailed was unbroken by any sound indicative of persons approaching.

There was nothing to show them that the captain had heard the signal, or that he was responding to it.

More and more alarmed did their countenances appear.

The one who had rung the bell still stood with the rope in his hand, and with his face as white as ashes.

"I told you something had happened," he ventured at last to say, in a faint whisper. "I knew something had happened, and now, you see, I was perfectly right."

Closer and closer the men drew to each other, and it became quite evident that the fear they had at first felt was becoming more and more unequivocal.

According to the rules and laws that had been laid down, they knew for certain that if the captain or any member of the band had heard the ringing of the alarm bell, they would, without an instant's delay—no matter how they might have been engaged—have made their way towards the spot from which the sounds proceeded—namely, the large cavern in which they generally assembled.

Now, however, the silence was perfect.

There was only one mode of exit from the cavern, all the others having been carefully blocked up so as to guard against the perils of intrusion.

The one that had been left open had been closely watched by the sentinel, and he had declared no one had come forth.

Where, then, were all the rest? and where were the two strangers?

How was it that no response was made to the peal upon the bell?

These questions they asked themselves over and over again without being able to make any answer to them.

And the longer they stood the more the silence seemed to oppress them—the more alarmed they became.

From their hiding-place, Jonathan and Wild junior were able to observe all these proceedings, and the latter, with his usual readiness of thought, perceived how easily the circumstance might be turned to their advantage.

The men were already in such a state of suspense and fear, that the least thing at all unusual would startle them.

The disappearance of the captain and his band could not but look to them as being something supernatural.

Therefore, how easy would it be to work upon their superstitious terrors.

George Wild saw all his advantage in a moment, and touched Jonathan in a peculiar way, to shew that he intended to make some demonstration.

Then, quickly placing both hands in a peculiar fashion over his mouth, George Wild uttered a sound that would be difficult indeed to describe.

It was neither a howl, nor a shriek, nor a groan, but a horrible cry that had in it the component parts of all three.

In the huge vaulted cavern the sound rang out with great effect, and borrowed many strange intonations.

Upon hearing it, all the men standing in the centre of the cavern started and rushed precipitately against each other.

The sentinel released his hold upon the bell-rope.

George was so well pleased with the result of this first cry that he determined to repeat it.

He did so, and the effect was prodigious.

Shrieking and crying out with unqualified terror, dreading they knew not what, and entirely the slaves to superstitious fears, the throng of persons made a sudden and simultaneous rush to the narrow entrance by which they had gained access to the cavern.

CHAPTER DCCXXVI.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON ARE MADE PRISONERS IN THE CAVERN BY THE BAND OF ROBBERS.

SCRAMBLING, fighting, howling, yelling, they all strove to force themselves through the aperture, and as they became wedged into a perfect mass, blocking up the passage, further progress was impossible.

Seeing what excellent effect had been already produced, George Wild thought he would favour them with a parting groan, if so it was called.

Therefore again were the old caverns filled with this hideous cry.

It was more prolonged than at first.

But when the many echoes had subsided, not so much as a retreating footstep could be heard.

George Wild laughed lightly.

He was pleased at the success of his manoeuvres.

"Good again, guv'nor!" he cried—"good again! What a parcel of cowards they are, to be sure! We have got rid of them beautifully."

"But they will come back," said Jonathan. "They are sure to screw up their courage and return. Perhaps they will be accompanied by others."

"No matter," said George; "they are now so much under the influence of their own fears that they will be scarcely able to get free. If they return, I shall be able to terrify them again."

"Not so easily as at first, though," said Jonathan.

"Well, perhaps not, but I am by no means sure they will return yet."

"It is best to be prepared."

"I quite agree with you there, so see that your pistols

are ready for immediate service, and I will do the like."

The weapons were examined and put in order.

When this was done they ventured to emerge from their hiding-place.

They walked quietly to the opening through which the terrified band had passed.

Here they stood and listened.

But not the faintest sound broke the deep silence.

"I believe we have scared them off," said George Wild. "I believe they are so terrified they have gone for good."

"I fear not."

"But that point must be ascertained, guv'nor; and I'll tell you another thing."

"What's that?"

"It is necessary that we should become the sole possessors of this place, and that we should have at our command the means of entering and leaving readily."

"But how is it to be done?"

"That I can't tell at present, but we shall soon know more. Follow me, guv'nor; we will creep along this passage and ascertain just where they are."

"Be careful."

"I will, depend upon it. Come, I feel sure there is no danger."

George Wild entered the passage, followed by Jonathan.

The darkness was intense, and therefore they groped their way forward very slowly.

They knew well, however, that there were no obstacles or dangers in the path, although the passage wound about in a serpentine fashion.

The further they advanced, however, the more necessity there was for caution, though still at present they could hear nothing.

At length, however, they perceived in the distance before them a very faint light—so faint that it could scarcely have been seen had not the darkness been so intense.

"They have got the place open," said George; "that light proves it. In their haste and terror, I should not wonder if they have not deserted the place."

Hoping that this might prove to be the case, Jonathan followed in his son's footsteps.

The light soon increased in brightness, until they were able to perceive the little aperture in the ground above.

When within about five yards of it, they paused, for the murmur of voices could at length be heard.

"They are outside," said George, in a faint whisper. "How on earth can we get rid of them? It must be done somehow."

"Hush—hush!"

He listened.

But beyond a continuous murmuring sound, they could not make out anything.

"I should think," said George, "that if I was to rise stealthily and discharge a couple of pistols among them as they stand together, that would be a finishing touch to their discomfiture. Here goes to try it."

Without waiting to hear what Jonathan had to say upon this subject, he hastily advanced, and by means of the rude pieces of wood that were knocked into the wall at the extremity of the passage, he raised himself up to the opening above.

Then, as soon as his head appeared above the surface, he fired a couple of pistols in rapid succession.

He did not stay to take any precise aim, but contented himself by discharging them at the crowd of people he could see standing a little way off.

They immediately dispersed, and George, without waiting to see more, dropped down again into the passage.

"There, guv'nor," he said, "I think we have done that nicely; at any rate, we will wait a little while and see."

There was a moment's silence, and then Jonathan exclaimed:

"I feel sure that you have done a very foolish thing, George."

"How so?"

"You have sealed our destruction."

"Speak out—say plainly what you think."

"Why, these men will now feel certain that some living

enemies of theirs are concealed in the caverns, and therefore they will determine to put an end to our lives."

"They may determine whatever they like," said George, "but how about doing it?"

"They will succeed," said Jonathan. "How easy, for instance, it would be to roll something over the opening in the ground above. If they did such a thing, how should we escape?"

"I never thought of that, guv'nor," ejaculated George, suddenly. "That's a serious danger indeed! I shouldn't wonder if they don't try something of the sort."

"I fully expect it."

"Then they sha'n't do it if I can help it!" exclaimed George. "Just lend me your pistols, and reload these. I will go up once more, and, at all risks, have a peep at what is going on."

George exchanged the pistols rapidly, and then again mounted, though he did not venture to expose his head without due caution.

Then he saw first of all that two men were lying down on the grass as if dead, while another was in a sitting posture, and evidently severely wounded.

The others, however, had vanished, and George projected his head still more, in the hope of being able to catch a glimpse of them, and wondering what they were about.

Nothing could be seen, however, and he was about to emerge, when he heard a sudden, violent crashing among the underwood that was growing near.

Then there emerged into the open space the remainder of the band who had made their way into the cavern.

On their shoulders they carried the trunk of a huge tree.

The length was not great, but the circumference was considerable.

No sooner did George see them than he at once guessed what they were about to do.

The trunk of the tree that they had procured they doubtless intended to thrust down violently through the hole communicating with the passage.

A more effectual mode of stopping it up could scarcely have been devised.

The mere weight of the piece of timber would be sufficient to wedge it so tightly into the hole in the ground as almost to defy all efforts at removal.

Certainly the only means by which such removal could hope to be expected was by requisite tools for making an excavation, and a great amount of labour.

"It will never do to allow them to carry that plan out," George muttered to himself, and as he spoke he brought a pistol to a level.

The men, unaware of their danger, came walking on in a direct line.

Wild junior's finger encircled the trigger.

One touch would suffice to cause the weapon to explode.

That touch he was about to give, when all at once he was struck with a second thought.

He lowered the weapon.

"Good," he said—"good."

These words were applied to the character of the thought that had just occurred to him.

Letting go his hold, he dropped down at once to the floor of the cavern, intending, apparently, to allow the men above to carry out their project without offering to them the least show of resistance.

Such a course of action as this seemed extraordinary in the highest degree—nay, even suicidal.

When he was above, he had the opportunity, by one discharge of his pistol, of discomfiting at least one of his foes.

Another weapon was handy, and could have been discharged almost without any perceptible interval of time.

It was from no doubt as to his own capabilities of taking a correct aim that made George pause.

He knew he could make certain of hitting his mark, and if the men were struck they would fall of course, and the trunk of the tree, being thus suddenly deprived of their support, would fall so heavily upon the shoulders of the rest as to force them down.

We have said that the piece of timber was very heavy, and therefore they could not all escape the consequences of such a fall unhurt.

These details are mentioned just to exhibit how strange it was that Wild junior should throw away such an excellent chance as this appeared to be.

What cunning scheme was it that had so suddenly entered his brain?

We shall see shortly.

The men above, finding they met with no sort of interruption, advanced rapidly to the hole in the ground, intending to effect their purpose with the least possible delay.

Jonathan Wild heard their footsteps above, but of course had no idea of what they were about.

He questioned George as soon as he dropped down.

But he was immediately admonished to be silent, and he obeyed.

Then, with a tremendous crash, accompanied with a great crumbling and rush of earth, the trunk of the tree was thrust down.

In an instant that faint, dim light that had filled the subterranean passage was extinguished.

The most intense darkness now prevailed, and Jonathan, taken so completely by surprise, uttered a shout of astonishment.

He fancied, above the noise made by the descending wood, he could hear voices above uttering cries of triumph.

But whether this was fancy or reality, he was so stunned and bewildered by the unexpected nature of the events that had occurred, that he could not decide.

After that, a most remarkable silence prevailed, for George Wild neither moved nor spoke, and all communication with the upper world appeared to be effectually cut off.

It was Jonathan Wild who broke the silence.

"George—George!" he said, in a suppressed voice.

"Yes, guv'nor?"

"What has happened?"

"Don't you understand?"

"Scarcely."

"Oh! I forgot! You didn't see what those rascals were about. However, I'll tell you what I saw."

"Go on, then."

"I looked out, and perceived that the remainder of the band were carrying on their shoulders the trunk of a huge tree, and as soon as I saw it I guessed what was their intention. It was to thrust it down in that fashion, and so completely make us prisoners."

"You knew that?" said Jonathan, in a voice hoarse with rage.

"Yes, guv'nor, of course I did! But don't excite yourself. What's the matter?"

"Matter?" cried Jonathan, more furiously than before. "Fool! dolt! idiot that you were! Why did you not apprise me of my danger earlier, or do something to prevent them from carrying such a project into execution!"

CHAPTER DCCXXVII.

JONATHAN WILD BECOMES ALARMED AT HIS SON'S BEHAVIOUR.

"Don't excite yourself, guv'nor," said George again, speaking in the calmest possible tones.

"Are you mad?"

"Not a bit."

"You must be!"

"Why?"

"If not, you would surely not have acted as you have. Curses upon you! How do you think we are to escape from this infernal place?"

"Leave that to me, guv'nor," was the confident reply. "Don't you put yourself out of the way, because there is no sort of occasion whatever."

"But did you not have the opportunity of slaying some of those men when you saw them advancing?"

"I most certainly had."

"Then why did you not avail yourself of it?"

"Because a second and a better thought occurred to me."

"What is it, then?"

"Don't be impatient, guv'nor, and you shall hear all

about it. I have scarcely had time to ponder over it myself yet."

"You must be mad!"

"No, no—quite the other way, guv'nor! Let us go back to the cavern, and when we get there I think you will agree with me that everything has turned out for the best."

Wondering how this could possibly be, Jonathan Wild complied.

As may easily be imagined, the confident demeanour of his son was not without producing a due effect upon him.

He knew full well, from former experience, that he was fertile in expedients, and that his brain was cunning enough to devise plans that would be hard indeed to overreach or destroy.

That feeling of anger and alarm which had at first excited him may therefore be said to have passed away.

So far from being in the least degree uneasy respecting his position, his mind was occupied in wondering what scheme it was that George had thought of.

In his impatience to know what this could be, he hurried back along the passage, being extremely desirous to gain the cavern as quickly as possible, and so have an end put to his suspense.

"Now—now, George," he exclaimed, as soon as they emerged into the large cavernous apartment, "now we are here, just tell me what your idea is."

"You are in a great hurry, guv'nor, but I don't wonder at your anxiety. A few words from me will, however, put matters quite right."

"Let me hear them, then, for I confess my feelings just now are anything but of a pleasant character."

"No doubt, guv'nor—no doubt. Well, then, in the first place, I told you when I saw those men coming I quite made up my mind to fire at them, and prevent them from fastening us in, but very luckily a thought struck me in time."

"And it is that thought that I am anxious to hear."

"I know it."

"Why not speak, then?"

"Because it is something I must approach by degrees. I cannot tell you straight at once—I must bring you round to it by a series of conclusions."

Jonathan uttered a growl of impatience.

"Well, then, I all at once recollected that I had heard the men say that in former times there had been various means of exit and entrance to these caverns, but that, by order of their leader, all had been stopped up save one."

"Yes, yes—I heard that as well."

"Then I thought as well that those men above, now that they had been fired upon, would inevitably arrive at the conclusion that human beings were here, and certainly persons who were unfriendly to them—in fact, they would guess that we were the two strangers that had been described."

"Well—well, but what has that to do with it?"

"You will see in a moment."

"Speak, then, and be quick."

"Knowing the other exits to be blocked up, they would think that an easy way of getting out of their present difficulty, and of putting an end to us as well, would be by blocking up that hole in the manner they have done."

"And a very reasonable idea it appears to be," said Jonathan. "I should think it just calculated to answer that end."

"Well, guv'nor, the most important thing for us to bear in mind is this: that the more secret we can keep our proceedings the better."

"True; but it does not seem to me that we are doing it; on the contrary, by our usual good luck, we are creating a regular disturbance around us."

"That's just what I thought, and just what I was fearful of," said George, "and although I might have prevented those men from blocking up the hole, yet the deaths of so many persons would inevitably have attracted suspicion to the spot. We should be searched for, and, if in the cavern, probably found."

"Well—well."

"Now, then, guv'nor, as your mind is somewhat pre-

pared, I may as well tell you just what my thought was."

"I wish you would."

"Then it was simply this: If those men were permitted to block up the passage securely, and were not interfered with at all they would very justly and reasonably conclude that we could never tell any tales respecting them, and that we could never injure them any more."

"Well—well."

"For this reason alone they would be willing to go quietly away. I don't think they would ever feel inclined to return, and certainly will never re-enter these caverns for the purpose of exploring them. The disappearance of their leader and the rest of their comrades in such a silent and inexplicable manner must seem to them like the work of magic."

"So it must."

"Well, then, can't you see that all this will be calculated to keep our retreat quiet? Those men, doubtless, are now elated with their triumph; they will go off, taking their wounded comrades with them, and there will be no extraordinary appearances visible anywhere around the spot."

"No, I suppose not."

"Well, then, you see how nicely I have managed matters?"

"I'll be d—d if I do!" roared Jonathan. "You forget—you forget!"

"Bravo!"

"Why do you cry bravo?"

Jonathan retreated a step as he asked the question.

"You needn't think I'm going mad, guv'nor!"

Jonathan looked at him distrustfully.

"I'm all right. I cried bravo because I was pleased to see some portion of your ancient spirit was returning to you—that was all. You spoke just then exactly as you did of old!"

"Bah!"

"It is no such unimportant matter!"

"But explain," roared Jonathan—"explain! You have looked only at one side of the case—you have suffered us to be made prisoners in this wretched place! How on earth are we to grub that tree up again?"

"I don't intend to do anything of the kind, or to make even the attempt!"

"Then what on earth do you mean to do?"

"Ah! now, guv'nor, you are coming to the point, and if you had asked me that question before I should have told you offhand."

"Well—well? I am anxious to hear."

"You ought to have a little more confidence in me. You don't think I should overlook such an important matter as that? But it came over my mind with the full force of conviction that it would be perfectly easy for us to discover one of the disused exits from this cavern, and, with a slight amount of labour, re-open it, and then have a point to emerge at far removed from that by which we had entered, and which was known to and used by the band."

"I begin to see," said Jonathan. "That strikes me as being a good idea."

"Oh, does it?"

"It has one drawback, however."

"Indeed! What is that?"

"Why, it strikes me very forcibly that it will be a much more difficult matter to open up one of those places than you imagine."

"Well I don't. I noticed when I was fetching the rope that there were some long pieces of iron against the wall; I didn't stop to examine them, but, at the first glance, I must say they looked very much like crow-bars."

"Then, if that's the case," said Jonathan, "we shall be able to go to work in good earnest."

"Of course we shall, and, as we have lost time enough already, let us make a commencement at once."

"With all my heart!"

"Come on, then, for, although you may not think it, I am as thoroughly sick of this place as you are, and yet, after all, it seems likely to turn out greatly to our benefit and advantage."

"So it does, and that's what reconciles me to it."

George went to one of the corners of the cavern, and quickly produced a couple of long, strong crowbars.

"There, guv'nor," he said, "just take that and feel it, and tell me whether you don't think that if we are armed with such things as these we shall be able to make our way out?"

"I think so; but let us try."

"That's the best thing; and, as we have nothing but chance to guide us, suppose we leave the cavern by that opening yonder, and see where it takes us to?"

As he spoke, George pointed to a natural opening in the rock, that looked as though it either formed a means of communication with some other cavern, or as though it was a small arched passage.

In either case, it certainly led out from the cavern they were in, and therefore, without hesitation, they plunged into its dark, shadowy recesses.

A few steps served to bring them to its extremity, and then they found themselves in a cavern greatly resembling that which they had left.

This they crossed in a straight line, and, reaching the opposite side, searched about for another indentation.

Having found one, they pushed on, and quickly entered the third cavern.

The succession of these places did not at all surprise them—in fact, they had been led to expect it, for the men had expressly stated that the hills were filled with such-like hollow places.

"Come along, guv'nor," cried George, in a voice of exultation, "we shall find our way out to the open air before long, rely upon it!"

CHAPTER DCCXXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON FIND THEIR SCHEME PROGRESSES FAVOURABLY.

GEORGE WILD walked forward with a confident step.

He had every hope of being able to carry out his scheme successfully.

A long, winding passage next attracted his attention, and, from its general appearance, he felt convinced that it would lead him to one of the closed-up points of exit.

In many places this passage was so low and so narrow that they could scarcely force their way through it.

In others it would widen, and rise in height until it would partake of something of the appearance of a cavern.

"Guv'nor," said George, "we are all right—I feel sure of it."

"I hope so."

"Can't you feel how fresh the air is?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, does not that prove that we are coming to an opening?"

"I suppose it does. But yet, did not the men say that all such places had been closed?"

"Yes, they did say so; but they did not state that they were so closely filled up as to prevent the fresh air from entering a little?"

"You are right."

"Of course I am, and with these capital crowbars I would wager my life I could force my way out."

Jonathan said no more, but pressed on close behind his son.

As they advanced the passage grew much larger, and presently, to their very great satisfaction, they perceived a faint light before them.

In size and appearance, it resembled a faint star more than anything else; but the resemblance was quickly lost.

So great was Wild junior's impatience that he could not wait to walk, but set on to run.

This pace quickly brought him to the end of the passage.

"Hurrah, guv'nor!" he ejaculated. "We are in luck's way and no mistake!"

"What is it?"

"Come closer, and I will show you."

"I see."

"And what do you think of that?"



[THE CAPTURE OF EDGORTH BEE BY JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON.]

It was plain enough to be seen that this exit from the cavern had been blocked up by a huge piece of rock having been brought and rolled up against it.

This was not done so well as to exclude all light, and that was how it was the passage came to be continually supplied with fresh air.

"Now, guv'nor," said George, "we've got a toughish job before us, but it must be accomplished. Bend your shoulders to it, and then it will be the sooner over."

While speaking, George commenced an attack upon the piece of rock with his crowbar.

He was well seconded by Jonathan, who perceived at once that this afforded the likeliest chance of making an escape from what was, to all intents and purposes, their prison-house.

But the large piece of rock had been wedged in with

greater tightness than George Wild at all anticipated, and, to his disappointment, he discovered that, after labouring till his arms ached, scarcely any perceptible difference was effected.

"We must do it, guv'nor," he said, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow. "Just you try for a few minutes while I rest, and then I will return to it with new strength."

Jonathan complied, but quickly paused from fatigue.

George Wild then advanced, and, using his crowbar in a more legitimate manner than he had done before, he was pleased to find that he was making progress.

Hitherto, he had dashed away in a most furious manner, without producing an impression.

Now he used the crowbar as a lever, and, inch by inch, the huge piece of stone retreated before him.

At length he moved it out so far that Jonathan Wild's impatience would not allow him to remain idle any longer, so he came to his son's assistance.

Between them the stone was quickly removed, until at length one final rush sent it clear away.

Jonathan was about to emerge at once.

But his son restrained him.

"No, no, guv'nor," he said—"be cautious! You don't know who may be on the look-out somewhere near. Wait a little while, and then we will take a peep."

The stone that had been dislodged rolled over once, and then, coming to the declivity of the hill, went turning over and over with ever-increasing speed, crashing and tearing its way through the underwood, until at last, with a perceptible shock, it stopped at the bottom, half burying itself in the earth.

The only sound that broke the silence was the twittering of many birds, and, reassured by this, George Wild at length ventured to show his face outside.

His eyes rolled quickly and keenly over the whole landscape, but he failed to see anything of an alarming nature.

"Come, guv'nor," he said, "here we are, quite right at last, as I told you we should be! We have achieved a complete triumph!"

The prospect obtainable from the opening in the rock was a most extensive and delightful one.

As far as ever the eye could reach, nothing but lovely green fields and trees could be perceived, except in one place, where a building of large proportions could be seen.

In appearance it was very picturesque, and had certainly been built for very many years.

No sooner did Jonathan Wild catch sight of its grey walls and curious pointed roofs, than he uttered an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"What's the matter, guv'nor?"

"You see that place yonder?"

"That house?"

"Yes, if you like to call it so."

"Well, what of it?"

"That's the very place we so wish to reach—that's the place where we shall be sure to find her."

"Well, then, we will say all things have turned out most convenient for us, guv'nor."

"They have—they have indeed!"

"You see how necessary it is to have me to arrange affairs a little. Why, here we are, just on the side of the hill that's nearest to the Manor House. What could be better?"

"Things look promising," said Jonathan, with a brightening visage. "But do not let us be so incautious as to remain here."

"I can't see anyone about."

"No, nor do I, and yet some prying eye may be gazing upon us."

"True, guv'nor—night is the time for us."

"It is; and until then we will keep ourselves secluded in the caverns."

"So we will. Come in, guv'nor. For my part, I am tired to death, and should be glad of a few hours' rest, and now I think we have a fair opportunity of taking it."

"Yes; and yet, upon second thoughts, there is something else I should like to do."

"What's that?"

"Could we not manage to creep cautiously through this underwood without danger of being seen?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"To the other entrance to the caverns."

"The one that was stopped up a little while ago?"

"Yes."

"But what can be your motive for going there?"

"Why, the men who attacked us may be lurking near. At any rate, it is important for us to ascertain whether they have left."

"So it is. Come on! I didn't think of it."

"Nor did I until I spoke, and I'll tell you another thing we have forgotten."

"Our horses?"

"Yes."

"I was just thinking about them when you spoke. It will be necessary for us to learn where they are."

"Certainly it will! We can do nothing without them, and they are too precious to be lost."

"I am sadly afraid they are lost already."

"Why so?"

"If those men have gone, rely upon it they have taken our horses with them."

"I hope not."

"So do I. But we must find out. If we have lost them, we should be in a poor way of escaping if rapid flight should be necessary."

Both Jonathan and his son were exceedingly anxious respecting their steeds; and no wonder, for, in all probability, they would be of immense advantage to them in case they should be attacked.

Therefore, without further parley, they crept through the brushwood, taking a direction that would bring them round to the other side of the hill.

All their movements were characterised by the utmost caution.

Still, as they proceeded, they observed nothing of an alarming character.

The whole place for miles round seemed to be deserted.

They had only a vague idea of whereabouts the inclosure was where they had first been confronted by the robbers.

Yet, by persevering, they hoped to find it.

Suddenly, when near the bottom of the hill, George clutched Jonathan tightly by the arm, and compelled him to come to a sudden standstill.

"Hush—hush!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter?"

"Listen, and then, if I am not mistaken, you will hear the murmuring of voices."

Jonathan was still immediately.

He strained his sense of hearing to the utmost.

Then, very faintly indeed, could be distinguished a low murmuring sound.

It required a quick ear to separate it from the rustling noise made by the wind among the tree-tops.

But all at once some word was spoken in a louder tone of voice than the rest.

Such being the case, neither Jonathan nor his son ventured to speak to each other, but contented themselves with exchanging significant glances.

While they remained at their present distance it was quite out of the question for them to be able to overhear what was said.

It might, however, be extremely important that they should be made acquainted with the conversation of the robbers, and therefore, after a brief pause, George Wild made an expressive gesture to Jonathan, and then began crawling forward with great secrecy and caution.

Then, before Jonathan knew what he was about to do, and although he trembled for the consequences, and dreaded a discovery, yet he followed in his son's footsteps.

The noise made by them in their progress was very slight, and while they continued this carefully it was scarcely possible that the robbers could hear their approach.

Presently they came to a place where the trees grew more thinly, and, fearing to be seen, Wild junior judged it prudent to stop.

Turning round, he perceived that Jonathan was pointing in a certain direction, and, without a word, he followed with his eye the direction of his finger.

CHAPTER DCCXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON RECOVER POSSESSION OF THEIR HORSES, AND MAKE EVERY PREPARATION FOR THE RECEPTION OF THEIR PRISONER.

GEORGE WILD then saw, though rather indistinctly, the figures of several men standing together in a group.

Judging by the movements that they made, the discussion that was going on between them was of a very animated nature; but, although both Wild and his son leaned forward and strained their hearing to the utmost, they could do no more than catch a word here and there.

While they were debating within their own minds what should be their next step, their cogitations were put a stop to by a sudden movement on the part of the men they had been watching.

Apparently they had been debating some point among themselves, and at last, after a good deal of discussion, had managed to arrive at a conclusion.

At any rate, they all moved rapidly away, and soon the trampling of their footsteps and the rustling of the brushwood became inaudible.

"I think they've gone," said George—"I really think they've gone!"

"I hope so; but such a thing seems almost too good to be possible."

"It does; but I'll tell you how I'll find out, guv'nor."

"How?"

"If you'll help me a little, I will climb up this tree—look, it's a very tall one, and full of branches. From that point of elevation I shall, no doubt, be able to catch a sight of them."

"Let us try," said Jonathan.

By his aid, Wild junior easily enough got up into the tree, and when once he was fairly among the branches there was no difficulty in mounting higher.

George ascended with great rapidity and agility.

Then, pausing in his ascent, he looked around him.

So thickly wooded, however, was the whole face of the country that he began to fear that he should be unable to see the men any more.

Yet, of course, there were open patches here and there, and if they should happen to cross one of them all would be well.

Judging by their character, however, it was not at all likely that they would thus expose themselves.

In all probability, they would be exceedingly careful to avoid any open place.

The more George thought about this the more certain he felt that this would be the case.

Yet, as he was up in the tree, he determined to give it a fair trial, and did not descend until a considerable time had elapsed.

"I have not been able to catch a single glimpse of them!" he exclaimed, in a tone of vexation, as soon as he reached the earth. "We must keep our eyes and ears open; we cannot make any mistake on the side of being careful."

To this Jonathan assented, and George said:

"Now, guv'nor, what we have next to look for are the horses."

"Just so."

"Well, then, first of all, we will discover if we can find the blocked-up entrance to the cavern. I have no doubt the horses are stabled somewhere near that spot."

This was a very reasonable conclusion indeed to arrive at, and encouraged by the hope that in this respect at least they should not be disappointed, the two villains took their way with a more confident step through the brushwood.

The open space was gained at last, and then, as a matter of course, the blocked-up entrance was quickly found.

Taking this as a centre point, they kept going round and round in larger circles, searching closely everywhere, and prying into every nook.

Their patience was at length rewarded by the discovery of a kind of hovel, built against the slope of the hill.

A more primitive-looking place could scarcely be imagined.

The walls and roof were roughly formed of various branches of trees, placed together with some skill, and daubed over with clay.

"They're in there for a hundred pounds!" said George.

"If the robbers have not removed them."

"Yes, of course, provided they have not; but look here, they are safe and sound enough."

George had entered the stable—for such was the use made of the building—while he spoke.

The two horses were there, both looking all the better for the rest they had had and the food that had been supplied to them.

"Well, now then, guv'nor," exclaimed George, "what are we to do?"

"Do you mean with the horses?"

"Yes."

"It is a point for consideration."

"So I think."

"Shall we leave them here?"

"They may be quite safe."

"They may; and yet, on the other hand, although the robbers have not taken them at present, yet they may purpose doing so."

"That's very likely. I can scarcely conceive that they would be so foolish as to abandon them. At any rate, if sold, they would fetch a trifle of money."

"Surely they will."

"My advice is to take them with us round to the other side of the hill; I have no doubt we shall manage to make a stable of some kind for them."

"Of course we shall."

"Come on, then, at once, lest they should take it into their heads to return."

This point being settled, the horses were led out without any further delay.

George took one by the bridle and Jonathan the other.

In this manner, they retraced their steps.

On their way they neither saw nor heard anything of the robbers they had seen conferring together, nor indeed did they catch a glimpse of any human being.

At last the opening in the hillside was reached, and, with all convenient speed, the horses were led inside.

Fortunate for them, the entrance to the passage was of considerable size, so that the horses were able to enter easily.

Then, beyond them, was a rude kind of apartment—not very large certainly, but yet large enough to answer the purposes of a stable.

Here, then, the horses were left, Jonathan and his son going outside and occupying themselves with gathering a quantity of grass, which was the only food they were able to offer them.

All these proceedings occupied a considerable time, and when they were at an end it was found that the day was considerably advanced.

"We shall not have much time for a rest, guv'nor," said George, "and yet I am so fearfully weary that I know not what to do."

"So am I."

"Let us rest, then, at once; here will do as well as anywhere."

"No," said Jonathan.

"Why not?"

"Let us make all our preparations first."

"What else is there to do?"

"Why, supposing we succeed in making our capture."

"Yes—yes."

"What shall we do with her? We ought to have some place all ready for her reception."

"So we ought, guv'nor—that's a very important thing that remains to be done."

"Then you think we had better set about it at once?"

"Yes, by all means; we shall rest much better when that's done."

"Then let us penetrate some distance further into the caverns."

"Yes, we want to find some small, secure chamber in which we can place her, and where she can remain until we have seen what turn events take."

"Exactly; and we shall succeed—I feel sure of it."

"I hope so."

"There is something like a conviction in my mind—a presentiment, or whatever you like to call it—that to-night we shall meet with a complete success."

"That's a pleasant feeling to begin with. I trust that you will not be deceived."

Some time elapsed before they were able to find a place that just suited their requirements.

At length, and quite by chance, they found a small opening in the rock, just large enough to allow anyone to pass through easily.

There was a passage of about ten feet in length, and then, after having passed along this, they emerged into a small chamber in the rock—that is, small as regards its area, but the height was something stupendous.

In shape, this chamber was almost circular, and of a diameter of twelve or fourteen feet.

How many feet high it was, however, no one could estimate.

Looking up, the eye saw nothing but a faint, gauzy mist hovering above.

A soft and gentle light was diffused all over the place.

No doubt its source was some opening in the roof, or else a series of small crevices.

While standing on the floor of the cavern, however, it was impossible to say from what source the light came, because of the inability of the eye to pierce the vapour that appeared to hang midway between the ground and the roof.

"Could any place be better than this, gov'nor?" said George, looking round him, and speaking in tones of the utmost satisfaction.

"I like it much," was the reply, "but it will be necessary for us to examine closely before we decide upon it."

"True; there must be no recesses, or hiding-places, or secret passages in the sides; if so, we shall lose her."

"Yes, you may depend upon that. I know her spirit, and she would not neglect any opening for escape."

"We can soon settle that point if we begin a careful investigation."

"Very true. I will tell you what my opinion is, gov'nor."

"What?"

"That if we find any little indentation, no matter how small, it will be best to block it up with large fragments of rock; you see there are plenty about, and by the aid of our crowbars we can wedge them in so tightly that her strength would be totally incompetent to remove them."

"That would be a good precautionary measure," was the reply, "and we will adopt it."

The very pains and trouble that Jonathan Wild and his son were at in making this cavern suitable for their purpose only shows how strong the conviction was in their minds that they should be able to succeed in their undertaking.

In such a place it was scarcely likely that they should fail to find numerous crevices and fissures in the walls.

Without stopping to consider or ascertain whither these might lead, the plan proposed was universally adopted.

As fast as they came to one, huge pieces of rock were rolled along the floor, and wedged in as tightly as their tools and strength would permit.

As may be supposed, this labour consumed a very great deal of time, and when they had ended, it was almost time for them to set out upon their expedition.

Yet when they had concluded their task and looked all around them to view what they had done, a feeling of satisfaction pervaded both their hearts.

The time and labour they had expended, they felt quite certain, had not been thrown away.

Now all was in readiness for the carrying out of their scheme.

The only thing that remained for them to do was to effect the capture.

When this was once done they felt quite easy in their minds as to the result.

In these caverns it was almost impossible for them to be found.

Moreover, they had an excellent opportunity of making themselves familiar with all their intricacies.

This they resolved not to omit, for in the case of an attack, this knowledge might afford them the means of preserving their lives and liberty when otherwise they would be lost.

But as everything was now done, and all preparations made, and as their prospects in the future looked tolerably bright, Jonathan and his son gladly laid themselves down and essayed to sleep.

It was long, however, before slumber would descend upon their eyelids, for their brains were busy with many thoughts.

For once, their usual precaution of one watching while the other slept was omitted.

This was partly because of the fatigue that both experienced, and partly from the consciousness that they should be in no danger of an interruption.

CHAPTER DCCXXX.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON TAKE UP THEIR QUARTERS IN THE DESERTED SUMMER-HOUSE, AND MEET WITH A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

HAVING ONCE sank off to sleep, it was not likely that either Wild or his son would awake quickly.

How long they may have slumbered they had no idea.

But George was the first to open his eyes.

For a minute or two he was confused and bewildered, being totally unable to think where he was.

Recollection coming back to him, he uttered a loud shout, and awoke Jonathan Wild at once.

"Up—up!" he cried. "I am afraid we have slept too late—look, the place is pitch dark!"

Such was the case.

The soft and gentle light that we have mentioned no longer filled the cavern, and the conclusion to be drawn from this was that night had descended upon the earth.

Both were in such a fever of impatience upon making this discovery, that they could not pause even to obtain a light, which they had the means of readily doing.

Confident in their ability to grope their way through the darkness, they endeavoured to reach the mouth of the passage.

In their progress they met with one or two contusions, but these were unheeded, and they continued to press eagerly forward.

Their great delight may be imagined when, upon coming within a short distance of the opening, they were able to perceive a faint grey light.

In a minute or two afterwards they emerged, and found that much of their apprehension had been groundless.

Night had come, it is true, but yet by many signs they could tell that it had only recently closed in; twilight, indeed, could scarcely have been said to have wholly departed, and the reason why that little chamber in the rock appeared so dark was that even at noontide the illumination was by no means bright.

Like the dungeons of Newgate, it was dark in them long after the sun had risen every morning.

"We won't go just yet, gov'nor," said George. "I am glad to find that we are no later."

"It is a satisfaction certainly; but why not start at once?"

"It is too early," said George; "if we are not exceedingly careful we shall boscon."

"Well, then, we may as well wait here and keep a good look-out."

No objection was made to this, and therefore they seated themselves upon the ground near the entrance to the caverns.

A night better suited to their purpose could scarcely have been found.

Dark heavy clouds came rolling up, that quickly spread themselves all over the sky, so that the darkness became in a little while unusually intense.

Every now and then, drops of rain would begin to fall, the precursors of that storm that we have already had occasion to mention more than once.

Some little debate took place as to whether they should encumber themselves with their horses.

But at length it was agreed that it would be safer to take them.

Accordingly, they were once more led out into the open air, and taken carefully down the somewhat steep sides of the hill.

The quantity of wood that grew everywhere around was highly favorable to Wild and his son, as it gave them such a good chance of concealing themselves.

Their progress, indeed, could be easily kept quite a secret, even though people were within a short distance of them.

But, from the intense silence that prevailed, and from the rough, disagreeable aspect of the weather, they concluded that there was not much probability of any persons being abroad.

The distance from the caverns to the old Manor House was much greater than it appeared to be, and, owing to their unfamiliarity with the neighbourhood, they went once or twice considerably out of their way.

At length they came to the stone wall surrounding the

estate—that stone wall which divided the grounds from the high-road, and which we have already described.

Here they agreed to pause, because on the opposite side of the road was a small coppice or plantation in which they would be able to leave their horses without danger of their being seen, and yet they could easily regain them if necessary.

This done, they climbed over the wall by mutually assisting each other, for its height was by no means great.

Dropping down upon the soft mould, they assumed crouching attitudes, and crossed the garden.

Almost the first thing they discovered was a small summer-house that, from its neglected and ruined state, had evidently been long disused and deserted.

Such being the case, it was of all others the place for them to secrete themselves.

Accordingly, without the least hesitation, they took up their quarters within it.

From this summer-house a view of the mansion itself could be obtained.

Several windows were beaming with light, showing that the inmates were still astir.

Up to this moment neither Jonathan nor his son had exactly arranged how they should act.

One reason why they had left this point open was because they believed it could be better discussed upon the spot than elsewhere.

In order to make calculations or arrangements, it was necessary for them to have some kind of idea of the nature of the place they were in.

Their first point, however, had been gained.

They had managed to enter the grounds and to conceal themselves, as they firmly believed they had not been seen by a single human being.

Owing to the excellent nature of the place in which they had ensconced themselves, they believed they might remain there several days, if necessary, without being seen.

During that length of time there would surely occur some opportunity when Edgworth Bess would be wandering in the grounds alone.

That opportunity they resolved to seize upon, and when once they had made her a prisoner, to gallop off with all speed to the caverns.

In the event of failing, there still remained to them the resource of entering the Manor House itself.

This they rather shrank from, because of the immense risk it would necessarily entail.

Still, if they could not succeed in capturing her in the grounds, they resolved to set the risk at defiance, and capture her in her own room.

Having come to this decision, they settled themselves down as quietly in the deserted summer-house as they could.

It was hardly to be expected that Edgworth Bess would be roaming in the grounds at such a late hour as that, and on such a tempestuous night.

Early in the morning they might stand a chance, and they could easily remain concealed until then.

"I'll tell you what it is, guv'nor," said George, "you go to sleep, and sleep for a little while; then I'll wake you, and go to sleep myself, for at present I don't feel half so vigorous and lively as I ought."

"Agreed," said Jonathan. "I am very weary. If anything occurs, you will be sure to wake me?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will sleep."

Jonathan laid himself down at full length upon the damp and moss-grown seat in the summer-house, and, despite the hardness of his couch, he was so fatigued, and his eyes so heavy with slumber, that he dropped off into a deep sleep at once.

George allowed him to remain thus until he began to show symptoms of uneasiness.

Then, in order that he should not make any sound, and to prevent all possibility of danger arising therefrom, he awoke him.

Jonathan grumbled for a time at being thus disturbed out of his sleep.

But George scarcely troubled himself to reply.

He had kept his eyes open only by a very strong effort, for the silence and darkness of the place were highly provocative of repose.

Impressing upon Jonathan the necessity of extreme cautiousness and alertness, George allowed himself to drop off to sleep.

A considerable time then passed.

Jonathan had seated himself in a tolerably comfortable attitude, and every now and then would fall off into a kind of doze, from which he only awoke with difficulty.

In this strange, unconscious state he remained for upwards of an hour.

Then a faint and unusual sound came upon his ears.

He roused himself completely.

He listened again.

In the intense silence, he could just distinguish a footstep, but where it came from he had no idea.

The sound seemed to reach him from all sides.

One thing, however, was certain, it grew louder.

He shook George violently and awoke him.

"Listen—listen!" he said; "but don't speak or move!"

The sound of the footstep could now be more distinctly heard than ever, and George at once turned his face to the back of the summer-house, for he felt confident that was the direction from which the sound came.

He was confirmed in this supposition by hearing the footstep pause, and then ensued a faint cracking of the boards.

He touched Jonathan lightly on the shoulder, and then walked out of the summer-house on tiptoe.

Jonathan followed him.

There was a kind of shrubbery just outside, and in this the two villains concealed themselves.

In a hasty and impressive whisper, George Wild then spoke:

"Hush—hush, guv'nor! Something important awaits us, I feel certain! Watch—watch! Surely we shall see something strange!"

The crackling noise now became much more distinct.

The reader, from what has gone before, will have no difficulty in deciding what that noise was, and by whom it was produced.

The footstep Wild and his son had heard approaching was that of Edgworth Bess, and she was now engaged in the effort to liberate herself from her strange place of imprisonment—if such it may be termed.

That it could be Edgworth Bess at this late hour of the night Jonathan Wild and his son never for a moment thought.

Yet it behoved them to take accurate notice of everything that went forward.

In one respect, it seemed clear that they had made a mistake.

They believed the summer-house to be entirely deserted.

But now there was ample evidence to show some one was about to enter it.

With a sudden sound, the woodwork divided.

Edgworth Bess then found herself in the summer-house.

She advanced to the door and looked out, as we have already described.

Owing to the darkness, however, neither Jonathan nor his son could see her distinctly.

They could only tell that there was a moving mass of something, looking more like a human form than aught else.

Then she advanced with the intention of making her way with all speed to the Manor House.

When she emerged on to the gravel path, Wild junior saw her more plainly, and he strained his eyes to their utmost extent.

At first he was disposed to disbelieve what he saw.

Nearer and nearer came the figure until it was close to him.

It passed by, and in passing he caught a better glimpse of the whole face and form.

He could scarcely restrain an exclamation.

But luckily for his own interests, he had sufficient command over himself.

Then turning to Jonathan, he said, in a faint whisper:

"I see her—I see her—yonder she goes. Quick—quick, and we shall capture her easily!"

CHAPTER DCCXXXI.

JONATHAN AND HIS SON SUCCEED IN MAKING EDGORTH BESS THEIR PRISONER, AND CONVEY HER TO THE CAVERNS.

A SLIGHT rustling of the bushes in the shrubbery followed these words.

The sound was unavoidable.

Yet George Wild, when he heard it, gnashed his teeth with rage.

It reached the ears of Edgorth Bess.

Terrified at she knew not what, she darted off wildly and swiftly.

There was only one idea in her mind, and that was to reach the Manor House as quickly as possible.

Finding that they had been discovered, Jonathan and his son commenced an immediate pursuit.

It was necessary for them now to strain every nerve.

If they did not capture their prisoner on this occasion, they would scarcely have another chance.

Knowing what the consequences of failure would be caused them to put forth all their strength and energy.

In her blind haste and great desire to escape the two men that were pursuing her, Edgorth Bess paid no attention to the path that lay before her feet.

Consequently she struck against the root of a tree that projected slightly from the earth, and owing to the rapid rate she was going at, she was flung with great violence to the ground.

She struggled to her feet.

But before she could renew her race, a heavy cloak was thrown over her that deprived her at once of breath and of power to shriek for aid.

So well was the cloak muffled round her that it put a stop to her struggles immediately, and not until she was on the point of suffocation did her captors remove it.

The delight and exultation of the two villains knew no bounds, to think they should have succeeded so easily and so quickly—it seemed incredible.

There was no doubt about the reality of the event that had just occurred.

There they were in the dark and silent garden, and between them they held the girl they had been so anxious to take prisoner.

"Now, guv'nor," George cried, "quick! The sooner we are out of this place the better. I feel as though I could shout aloud for very joy."

"Don't be so foolish!" growled Jonathan. "We have succeeded—let that knowledge content you and keep you quiet."

"Very good. I'll carry her for a little way, guv'nor, then you can relieve me of the load. Between us we shall soon carry her to the place where we have left our horses."

"We shall."

They moved forward rapidly, and by carrying out the suggestion thus made much time was saved.

There was a little delay and difficulty in getting over the wall.

But at last that task was accomplished.

Jonathan Wild then crouched down in its shade with the prisoner, and remained there while his son hastened to the little plantation where the horses had been left.

George was absent on this errand only a few moments, yet it seemed a long time of anxiety to Jonathan, who kept straining his ears and listening, fearing that he should hear something of a pursuit.

To his great relief, he at length saw his son appear.

The horses were brought close.

Edgorth Bess was lifted on to one of them, and George mounted behind her.

By passing his arm round her waist and clasping her tightly to him, he was able to keep her perfectly secure.

Jonathan mounted, and in another moment they were going at full gallop towards their destination.

The dangers in their path were of no mean description.

But that was not a time to shrink from trifles.

They were both aware how necessary it was that they should gain the friendly shelter of the cavern with as little loss of time as possible.

Partly from fright, and partly from the cloak having been wrapped so tightly around her, Edgorth Bess had

swooned, and at present gave no signs of returning animation.

This was a state of things with which George Wild was by no means disposed to quarrel, since it saved him a vast amount of trouble.

As far as ever it was practicable, they rode at full speed among the trees, although they received several sharp blows from low-lying branches while doing so.

When the trees grew so thickly together that further progress in this manner was impossible, they dismounted.

The remainder of the distance to the mouth of the cavern was then performed in the same manner as they had crossed the garden.

That is to say, they took it in turns to carry their captive in their arms.

The ascent was very steep, and by the time they reached the cavern entrance both Wild and his son were so fatigued that they felt they could scarcely have carried her a dozen yards further.

With all convenient speed the horses were led through the narrow aperture, and Edgorth Bess placed down upon the damp ground.

This change of position served to restore her to her senses.

She moved slightly, and then opened her eyes.

As may be expected, her brain was for a long time in a state of hopeless confusion.

So many strange adventures had befallen her on that night that it was hard to say where they had ceased, or whether the whole was not a dream, or whether she was dreaming still.

While she was endeavouring to resume a proper command over herself, Jonathan Wild addressed a few unimportant words to his son.

At the sound of his much-dreaded voice she uttered a low, hysterical cry, and then again relapsed into utter unconsciousness.

The horses having been attended to, a light was procured, and Edgorth Bess carried into the small chamber which was destined for her reception.

Finding her still insensible, here they left her lying on the ground as before.

The entrance to the dungeon was closed up by means of a huge stone.

Wild and his son seated themselves near.

They were determined not to allow their prisoner any chance of escape.

"We will rest till morning, guv'nor," said George; "but we will take it in turns to sleep. We have got our prize now, and we shall be very greatly to blame if we lose it."

"We shall indeed," said Jonathan. "If she slips through my fingers again I shall be out of all patience."

"Nay—never talk like that, guv'nor; it's not worth while to despond when everything around us wears so bright an aspect. Why, what more could you expect? Who would have believed that she would have fallen into our hands so easily and so quickly?"

"It does seem indeed surprising," returned Jonathan. "Fortune is favouring us greatly—that's the simple explanation of the matter."

"I trust, then, that she will continue to do so, and not turn the tables upon us."

"So do I."

"But let us rest now—let us rest. We will defer all our future plans and arrangements until to-morrow. We shall have an interview with our prisoner then, and shall be able to judge something from her manner and reception of us."

This was at once agreed to, and their original plan was carried out.

Edgorth Bess remained in a partial or total state of insensibility until early morning.

Then she slowly recovered her senses, and by dint of much thought and difficulty, managed to form a tolerably good idea of her precise position.

She remembered how she had been suddenly seized, and then there was an indistinct recollection of having heard the hateful voice of Jonathan Wild.

She looked all around her, and found herself in a strange cavernous apartment, the bare appearance of which was enough to strike terror into her heart.

All around, the walls looked dark and frowning, and

in many places pieces jutted over that threatened every moment to fall upon her and crush her.

Then far up above—how far she could not by any possibility guess—could be seen the faint light of early day.

No doubt, on the summit of the hill it was bright and glorious sunshine.

But only a dubious twilight filled her gloomy dungeon. Yes, she was once more a prisoner in the hands of Jonathan Wild.

She had again fallen completely in his power, and this time she knew that there was no hope to expect.

Having once realised this dreadful knowledge, she sank down upon one of the pieces of rock on the floor of the cavern, and clasping her hands over her face, wept long and bitterly.

How much she blamed herself for what had taken place.

Had she restrained her curiosity, or had she taken the precaution not to venture out into the grounds during darkness, this calamity would not have happened.

This blaming herself for her actions, however, did not the slightest good.

She was there now a prisoner, and, beyond a doubt, so well confined, that all the efforts that she might make to escape, would be completely futile.

How long she may have remained in this dejected attitude she knew not.

But her tears continued to flow, and her heart to swell, until she feared it would really break.

It was no wonder that she should give way to an extremity of grief at finding herself in such a position as this.

Had she been the prisoner of any other person than Jonathan Wild she could have felt tolerably content.

But she knew the desperate nature of his position.

She knew as well the fiend-like nature of his heart, and felt certain that he would stop at no atrocity, if by that means he could accomplish his revenge.

That she might be the object of his insane vengeance seemed only too probable, for it was not likely that Jonathan's elaborate and particular motives for making her a prisoner should occur to her mind.

At last her tears refused to flow, and then, in a grief that was all the more terrible on that account, she rose to her feet and made a tour of her dungeon.

She looked at all the walls, but found no opening—no place that afforded her the slightest hope of escape.

She saw how carefully the different fissures had been wedged up by masses of rock, and her heart sank within her.

Every pains had, beyond a doubt, been taken to prevent her recovering her liberty.

High up overhead, no doubt, there was some opening large enough to allow her to pass through.

But how was it possible that she could climb up to such a great height?

No, that thought was quite out of the question, and when again she sunk down upon the piece of rock and bowed her head upon her shoulders in abject grief, it was with the perfect conviction that she was wholly and utterly in the power of Jonathan Wild and his son, and that she of herself could do nothing to extricate herself from it.

While as for her friends, they might remain in ignorance of her fate or whereabouts until too late to save her.

CHAPTER DCCXXXII.

GEORGE WILD AND JONATHAN MAKE KNOWN THEIR INTENTIONS TO EDGORTH BESS.

THE sad reflections of Edgorth Bess were broken in upon by a strange sound, which at first puzzled her exceedingly.

She changed her position, and rose up to her full height.

She listened half in terror, half in expectation.

It seemed almost as though some portion of the cavern was giving way and falling to the ground.

The real cause was that Jonathan and his son were engaged in rolling away the huge piece of rock that they had used to block up the entrance.

Almost immediately afterwards they entered the dun-

geon, and when Edgorth Bess caught sight of the forms of her hated persecutors, she hastily retreated, and crouched down behind a huge stone that would, she thought, prove some sort of a bulwark between herself and her foes.

This movement was noticed by Jonathan and his son with a derisive grin.

With a countenance blanched by fear, with her heart beating so dreadfully that she could scarcely breathe, and with her lips apart, Edgorth Bess gazed at them apprehensively, watching every movement that they made, and every change in their countenances.

For some moments neither George nor Jonathan spoke.

They kept their eyes riveted upon the form of their prisoner.

Evidently they enjoyed the state of confusion and dismay that she was in.

Perhaps they were waiting for her to speak first.

But if this was the case they were disappointed.

Had her liberty depended upon it, it is questionable whether Edgorth Bess would have been able to pronounce a single word.

"Now, then," said Wild junior, at length, "don't look so precious frightened! Don't you know who we are? What have you to be afraid of?"

Edgorth Bess made no reply.

"Don't you want to know why you are here? Do you not wish to learn what it is that we intend to do with you, eh? Why the devil don't you speak?"

Still a silence.

"You are obstinate," said Jonathan Wild, speaking for the first time.

At the sound of his voice Edgorth Bess shuddered from head to foot, and, if such a thing was possible, her face turned just a little paler than it was before.

"It doesn't matter," he continued, in the same harsh, grating tones, "you can listen, I am certain, and as for your own speeches, they don't matter; perhaps all you would have to say would be to implore us to release you!"

"Let me do the talking, guv'nor," said George. "I can come to the point better. Now then, just listen to me, will you, and pay attention. Can you hear what I say?"

Dreading some fresh violence, and anxious if possible to conciliate her foes, Edgorth Bess nodded her head.

"Oh, well, that's something," replied George. "Now, as you can hear and understand, just listen to this little explanation."

"I'll tell her," said Jonathan.

"No—no, guv'nor, I will."

"Go on, then, and be quick."

"You know who we are," commenced George, "and I don't mind confessing to you that we are in a most perilous position; we have had many narrow escapes of our lives; but we live yet, and fortune is now, I hope, turning in our favour."

"Not so much introduction," said Jonathan.

"Hold your row, guv'nor," was the rough rejoinder.

Then in a calmer tone of voice, he continued:

"When the guv'nor and myself found how badly off we were, we were obliged to come to some decision as to our future conduct, and therefore we proposed to leave England—that is, if you would permit us."

Edgorth Bess stared at him in blank amazement.

Her astonishment even enabled her to overcome her fear, and therefore she ejaculated:

"If I would allow you?"

"Yes, certainly. I am glad you have found your tongue at last, because that will make the conversation more easy and the result more satisfactory to both of us. As I said, we have made up our minds to leave England, if you will let us."

"I am at a loss to understand you."

"Then I will soon make my meaning clear. We would go without asking your leave and licence if we only had the means, but we have not. Now do you begin to understand?"

"I do not—I am puzzled."

"Well, then, you have at last succeeded to your wealth—you have made many powerful friends, who would doubtless do anything you ask them. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps it is."

"I am sure it is; and now I will be more explicit, and tell you why it is we want your permission to leave. The police are abroad in strong numbers—so strong that we can scarcely pass through them—and for another reason, we have no money."

"But what has that to do with me?" asked Edgworth Bess, more boldly. "Why have you taken me a prisoner in this way? Let me tell you that this act will most certainly bring down destruction upon your heads."

"No it won't," said George, decidedly—"quite the reverse. It was our last and only hope of safety, and I'll take good care that it does not fail us."

Edgworth Bess was more puzzled still.

"There are two things we require you to do," continued George. "You can please yourself whether you do them or not; but understand clearly, that the consequence of refusal will be death."

"What are your requisitions? Anything that is in reason I will grant."

"Now, that's what I call exceedingly satisfactory," said George, in tones of complacent satisfaction. "What do you say, gov'nor?"

"Tell her what the conditions are," was the gruff response.

"Well, then," said George, "the first is that you use your influence with your powerful friends to allow us the opportunity of making our escape from England. A hint has only to be dropped in the proper quarter, and then the whole thing would be easy enough. We would leave England, and never return to it again."

Hearing these words, the heart of Edgworth Bess beat high with hope.

She could scarcely believe in the reality of the words she had just listened to.

"That's the first condition," said George. "What do you say to it?"

"I will comply with it gladly—willingly," she answered. "Whether I have or not the power you suppose I have I cannot tell, but I will do everything that lies in my power."

"Good," said George. "No more is required. I feel sure, if you are willing, the matter can be settled in a moment. Now, then, for the other condition."

"And if I comply with both," said Edgworth Bess, "shall I be set at liberty?"

"You will; and what's more, you will never again be troubled by us, as we will leave England, and never return to it again."

"Let me know it, then," said Edgworth Bess, eagerly and hopefully.

"Why, the fact is, we are badly in want of money. We have none, and you have plenty—much more, indeed, than you could spend or than you can know what to do with; so surrender to us a portion of that wealth, to make it worth our while to leave England, and then we are off at once."

Edgworth Bess clasped her hands together.

"I comply," she said—"I comply, gladly and willingly. You need not have used these harsh measures towards me. If you had addressed yourself to me, I should have gladly granted your requests."

George drew a long breath.

"We did not know that," he said. "However, it will be all the same. You will have nothing to complain of in your imprisonment if you only remain in the humour you now are."

"I shall not change, rest assured of it."

"Well, then, all I can say is, that I am very glad, and you will quickly be at liberty."

"But the amount," said Jonathan—"you have not told her the amount."

"Well, I suppose it does not much signify. However, we intend to be perfectly reasonable and moderate. All we require is fifteen thousand pounds!"

"Fifteen thou—" gasped Edgworth Bess.

"Sand pounds!" said George, emphatically, finishing the sentence for her.

"Oh, it's enormous—outrageous!" she ejaculated. "I imagined that you were in earnest when you said that your desires were moderate."

"And are they not?"

"How can you call them so since the amount you ask for must be half my fortune?"

"Pooh, pooh!—nothing of the kind! In comparison to

your total wealth it is a mere trifle; you would never miss it, and surely it would not be worth your while to sacrifice your life for such an amount!"

"Yes," said Jonathan, "look at it in that light. Your life is entirely in our hands. We suppose it to be worth fifteen thousand pounds, and that's the least price we shall take for it! If you think it is too much, why, we will slay you at once, without remorse!"

He produced a pistol as he spoke, and deliberately cocked it.

Such a bloodthirsty expression at the same time pervaded his countenance that Edgworth Bess shrank close down to the floor in her alarm.

"No—no!" she said. "Mercy—mercy! Do not slay me!"

"Well, then, in a word, do you consent to give us the amount we ask? Quick—quick!—your answer! Either way—I care not!"

He brought the pistol carefully to a level—so carefully that Edgworth Bess, whose eyes were fixed upon it by a kind of dreadful fascination, fancied she could see right down the barrel as far as the bright bullet that was in it.

"Yes," said George—"be quick! Your life or fifteen thousand pounds! We are ready to take either, so be quick and say which you will part with!"

Edgworth Bess again felt unable to answer.

This time it was because of the thousands and thousands of thoughts that seemed to come all at once thronging into her brain.

The loud, angry tones of Jonathan Wild falling again upon her ear aroused her from her reverie, if we may so term it.

"Let me think," she said—"give me a short time to reflect, and you shall have my answer."

"Good," said George—"that's a very reasonable request, and to show you that we think so, we will grant it at once. We will leave you, because we feel sure that a little reflection will show you how foolish it would be on your part to sacrifice your life for so paltry a sum as fifteen thousand pounds."

He turned round as he spoke, to leave the cavern, and was followed moodily and sullenly by Jonathan.

It was a great relief to Edgworth Bess when she saw their forms disappear in the narrow passage.

Immediately afterwards she heard the heavy stone again rolled into its place.

But she did not see George Wild clap Jonathan enthusiastically upon the shoulder, nor hear him say:

"All's well, gov'nor—all's well! Rely upon it, when we go to ask her for her answer, it will be as reasonable as we can wish. Was it not a good thought, gov'nor?—an excellent thought, and better than all foolish ideas about revenge and such-like. Life before all say I."

CHAPTER DCCXXIII.

EDGWORTH BESS MAKES AN EFFORT TO ESCAPE, AND IS FOILED IN THE MOMENT OF SUCCESS.

EDGWORTH BESS had asked for time to think over the proposal that had been made to her by Wild junior, but it was more with the view of getting rid of her persecutors for a time than for the genuine purpose of reflection.

The importance of her situation, however, soon pressed itself upon her notice.

It was necessary to come to a decision.

George Wild had placed the question before her in the simplest and plainest manner.

She had to choose between parting with fifteen thousand pounds or her life.

Would she not estimate that priceless possession at a higher sum?

Would not there be others, too, who would do so?

Surely, yes.

Had she been so situated as to have no one else to please or consult except herself—had she been in the position to say, "Go—leave England, and take the wealth you ask for with you," she would most certainly have said these words.

Fortunately, she had not that power, or the two villains would have escaped that punishment which was so justly due to their crimes.



[EDGORTH BESS IS RECAPTURED BY JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON.]

Even now she hesitated whether to make the application which was demanded of her.

What would those friends of hers—those friends who in the hour of adversity had shown themselves so worthy of the name—what would they be likely to say under such circumstances?

She was well acquainted with the details of all the plans that they had laid.

Not one particular had escaped her, for Steggs had judged it best to confide all in her.

Would they not be justly incensed if she by any act interfered with those schemes, upon the fruition of which they had, as one may say, staked their existences?

Truly was she in great perplexity.

Then, from her friends, she would turn to a consideration of her own position.

She was a prisoner.

No. 155.—BLUESKIN.

Hopelessly a prisoner.

No strength of hers, no skill would enable her to escape from that stronghold of Nature's own making.

Her heart completely sank within her bosom whenever her eye rested on the massive rocky walls.

They had threatened her life.

Threatened in a manner that showed that they were frightfully in earnest.

She knew them both well.

She knew their natures to be such that if angered by her obstinacy, as they would call it, they would, without the slightest scruple of compunction, put her to a cruel death.

With such an alternative as that before her, would it not be better to sacrifice all she had?

Would she not be blamed for not having in the first place set the highest value upon her life?

She thought so, and came to a decision.

Then she felt calmer.

It would perhaps be better for all if Jonathan Wild quietly left the country.

A great danger would then be removed from Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

"Yes—yes," she murmured—"I will comply with their demands, extortionate as they are, and if it lies in my power, they shall go, and then I trust we shall hear of them no more, and that I shall begin to realise the meaning of the word happiness."

Not for one moment the question flitted across her mind would Jonathan and his son keep their word—after they had once left England would they return to it—would they again apply to her and so drain her of her wealth in order to purchase their forbearance?

Considering the character of the two villains, this was by no means improbable.

But Edgworth Bess dismissed the thought.

It was too terrible to be dwelt upon.

Sufficient surely was it, under present circumstances, that she should look at present danger and leave that which was in the distance until it absolutely forced itself upon her notice.

Her captors showed no desire to hasten her in her decision, and at length she rose, and, by the better light that then prevailed, began to make a closer examination of the singular circular cavern in which she was kept prisoner.

But she saw nothing that had escaped her on her former inspection, and after having paced its narrow limits several times she sat down, with an oppressed spirit, upon the fragment of rock which had already served her for a seat.

Here she remained for a long time—how long, she could form no just idea, for she had no means by which she might judge of the flight of time.

Suddenly she heard again the rumbling sound produced by the removal of the mass of rock that blocked up the passage.

This time she was at no loss to understand the meaning of the sound as she had been on the former occasion.

The moment she heard it she started to her feet.

A wild hope darted into her mind.

She might escape.

She might avail herself of the opportunity to dart past her foes, and among the intricacies of the caverns she might elude their pursuit.

At any rate, she had everything to gain and nothing to lose by making such an attempt.

Therefore she resolved to try it.

It was well perhaps that she had no time for further reflection, otherwise she might have abandoned the idea so hastily formed.

The stone having been at last removed, Wild and his son advanced along the passage.

Edgworth Bess stood waiting for them to make their appearance.

Her heart was beating at a fearful rate.

She pressed close to the wall, and as her two captors entered the cavern hastily they did not perceive her.

Finding the way clear, she darted along without a moment's hesitation.

Fear lent speed to her feet.

So suddenly was this act performed, that Jonathan and his son were completely taken by surprise.

They were too late to prevent her escape.

Horrible execrations escaped their lips, and then they commenced an immediate pursuit.

They could hear her faint footfalls on the rocky floor before them—they could hear the rustling of her dress.

Nothing but the idea that she was flying for her life would have enabled Edgworth Bess to rush onward along a path with which she was totally unfamiliar, and which was in some places plunged in the most complete darkness.

But this latter circumstance was in her favour, for it gave her the opportunity of getting out of the way of her foes altogether, which would have been impossible in the daylight.

The fearful imprecations which escaped their lips fell plainly upon her ears, and increased her terror.

She would now have their anger to appease in case she should be so unfortunate as to be recaptured.

And, alas! that event seemed only too likely to take place.

They were certainly gaining upon her.

Not only could they run better, but they possessed the additional advantage of familiarity with the ground beneath their feet.

Then suddenly Edgworth Bess perceived before her a faint beam of light.

This told her that she must be nearing an opening of some kind—that she must be approaching the outer world.

This was a fresh incentive to exertion.

Again she bounded forward, and in such a manner as to distance her foes completely.

They knew well enough the cause of this, and they redoubled their endeavours to come up with her.

But on, on she flew—on with the frantic speed of despair.

Brighter and brighter—larger and larger grew the light.

There could now be no doubt about the nature of it.

One of the exits of the cavern was before her.

Could she only pass through it.

Could she only gain the open air beyond?

Then, and then indeed would she hope that she might regain her liberty altogether.

Some friendly persons might be close at hand.

Or some chance pedestrian would surely throw around her the shield of his protection.

But as she neared the wished-for spot she felt her strength failing her.

Her limbs trembled beneath her.

Her eyes grew dizzy.

Her brain went round and round.

Her exhausted lungs refused to perform their functions.

Yet, in spite of all, she struggled on.

Struggled on with strange sounds ringing like death knells in her ears, and with strange objects floating before her eyes.

But she could feel the fresh air blow upon her heated brow, showing her how close she was to freedom, for so, in the confusion of her intellects, she considered getting clear of the caverns to be.

She strained every nerve—every muscle, and yet she trembled, staggered, reeled, and almost fell.

By an extraordinary effort she regained her feet, but it was only to stumble the next moment afterwards, and then she fell helplessly upon the hard ground of the cavern, with her body half in and half out of the entrance.

A shout of triumph rang in her ears, and the next moment her foes pounced upon her.

They need not have been so rough or violent, however.

She was perfectly helpless, and could no more rise than she could fly.

The angry passions of both Wild and his son were, however, fully aroused, and they could not be subdued all in a moment.

George raised his hand in an attitude to strike.

But Jonathan restrained him.

"Hold!" he said. "Do you know what you are about?"

"Curse her!" was the angry answer. "I have a great mind to—"

"Be quiet! We have captured her again, and that will be sufficient."

"But I can't take it so calmly."

"Bah! You don't understand."

"Understand what?"

"Why, after this, she will be more in our power than ever; or, rather, she will feel herself to be, which is just about the same thing."

With an inarticulate growl, George stooped down and raised Edgworth Bess in his arms.

She shuddered visibly as he did so, and guessing the cause of her repugnance, he pressed her all the closer to him.

But Edgworth Bess was so thoroughly prostrated as to be incapable of making any resistance.

She indeed was only just conscious, and that was all.

Muttering curses, Wild junior carried her again into the cavern.

Jonathan followed him.

Then, having reached it, he deposited her rather roughly upon the ground.

"Come, guv'nor," he said, turning round, "let us leave her for a time. When we return she will doubtless be more reasonable."

With these words, he left.

The heavy stone was rolled into its place again.

Then all was still.

CHAPTER DCCXXXIV

FORTUNE TURNS UNEXPECTEDLY AGAINST JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON.

EDGORTH BESS was then left to recover her senses as best she could, and, as she was dreadfully fatigued, a long time elapsed before she showed any signs of returning to her senses.

At length, however, she rose painfully to her feet, and, clasping her hands over her face, wept long and bitterly.

The disappointment she had just experienced was almost more than she could bear.

Her ears, too, were all the time upon the stretch, for there was nothing she dreaded so much just then as the approach of Jonathan Wild and his son.

She could easily guess that their rage would be much excited by her attempt at escape, and how to conciliate them she knew not.

But the two villains remained perfectly quiet for several hours, the fact being that they were resting themselves by a long sleep.

At length the stone was again rolled away, and they entered the cavern.

"None of your tricks," growled Jonathan. "You can't escape, and you may get yourself injured; so beware!"

Edgorth Bess shrank back until she reached the wall of the cavern, and then leaned against it, so overcome with terror as to be on the point of swooning again.

"Come," said George, who noticed her condition, "we don't want to be severe with you. It was only natural you should attempt to escape. Now you've tried it, and found it no good; so just say whether you intend to comply with our demands or not."

"I will—I will!" said Edgorth Bess, hastily. "Anything you like to propose I will consent to!"

"Well, now," said Wild junior, "that's what I call being reasonable, and you will find that I sha'n't take any advantage of you in such a case. You shall just write a letter to the person from whom you receive your money, and then leave the rest to us."

"I will willingly," said Edgorth Bess. "But where can I obtain writing materials?"

"I have them here," said George. "I have come quite prepared."

He fumbled in his pocket for some time, and at length produced a thick pocket-book, doubtless the proceeds of some robbery or other.

He turned over the leaves impatiently, looking for a blank one, and, having found what he sought, he drew out the pencil, and sucked the lead for some time, so as to soften it.

"There," he said, "that will do. Bear on heavily, to make the writing distinct."

Edgorth Bess took the articles proffered to her, and said:

"Now, what shall I write?"

"These words," said George—"write them down as I speak."

Edgorth Bess prepared to obey.

"I have been taken prisoner by Jonathan Wild, who demands ransom for me. The conditions are, that he and his son are allowed the opportunity of leaving England unmolested, and that the sum of fifteen thousand pounds be paid to them. To this I have given my consent, and I trust you will not hesitate to adopt these the only means of freeing me from my dreadful state of confinement."

"In case of a refusal, they have sworn to take my life, and I do not doubt they will be as good as their word."

"The reply to this letter must be sent to King Charles's

Statue, Charing Cross, and if any treachery is attempted my life will pay the forfeit."

"Now sign it," said George, "and just say to whom I am to take it."

"The Lord Chancellor," was the response.

George made a wry face.

"Is it from him that you receive your supplies of money?"

"It is—everything comes from him."

"Then I have no resource but to submit," said George.

"However, the result shall be tried, and, until we know, you will remain here a prisoner, but yet in safety and unhurt. Come, guv'nor—we will commence this business at once."

With these words, the two villains left the circular cavern, and Edgorth Bess once more remained a solitary prisoner.

"I have my doubts," said George to Jonathan, after the stone had been rolled into its place—"I have my doubts; but this is a bold stake that we are playing for, and we must try if we can win. If it had been to anyone but the Lord Chancellor, I should have had better hopes."

"Don't despair now," said Jonathan. "I think the reason is because you have obtained the letter so easily."

"Well, perhaps so. At any rate, I will try; and now, guv'nor, I'll tell you what we must do."

"What?"

"I will take this letter, and, if possible, obtain the money. Don't frown or look suspicious. For once in my life, I promise to be fair and straightforward with you. You can remain here on guard over the prisoner."

At first, Jonathan was disposed to quarrel with this arrangement; but George was firm, and, as usual, carried his point.

Evening being now about to set in, he commenced his preparations for departure.

His horse was saddled, and he led him out of the opening in the rock, having first ascertained that there was no one in sight.

Jonathan watched him for a little while—in fact, until his form was hidden among the trees.

Then he turned back into the cavern.

Scarcely had he done so than he was startled by the loud report of firearms.

His cheeks blanched and he trembled from head to foot as he heard the sound.

It was strange that such an effect should be produced upon him.

But the fact was, for a full moment he remained as though suddenly deprived of life.

The blood seemed to stagnate round his heart.

Then he heard a hasty foot outside, and immediately afterwards Wild junior rushed, or rather staggered, in.

"Quick—quick!" he said. "Roll the stone to the opening—close it up—our foes are upon us!"

"What has happened, George?"

"D—n me if I hardly know!" was the angry reply; "but suddenly I found myself surrounded by a whole troop of police officers, who called upon me to surrender. I refused, of course, and managed to escape them, but they fired a volley, and I am sure I carry at least three of the bullets in my body. Oh, curses!"

A howl of agony escaped him at this juncture.

He was evidently badly wounded, for he sank down like a stone to the floor.

The sound of hurried footsteps could now be heard without, mingled with the crashing of branches.

"They come," said George—they come! "Why do you not block up the entrance? Quick—quick!"

There were plenty of loose fragments of rock lying about, which seemed at some time or other to have fallen from the roof of the cavern, and selecting one of these, Jonathan worked with might and main to roll it towards the aperture.

"I would help you if I could, guv'nor," said George; "but, curse me, I am done for this time! It's all over with me—I can feel I am wounded to the death."

A succession of hideous groans came from his lips after pronouncing these words.

Great indeed was the effect produced upon Jonathan Wild by this announcement.

In his hard and rugged heart there was one tender

place left, and that was the affection he had for his villainous son.

The intelligence that he had received a mortal wound was almost too much for him, and it seemed as though he was deprived of all strength.

But George again urged him to exertion.

The officers could now be heard very close at hand indeed.

Straining every nerve and muscle, Jonathan rolled the huge block of stone over and over until at last, with a crash, it wedged itself into the orifice.

"That's better, guv'nor," said George, faintly—"that's better! Fight it out to the last—don't give in to them! Fight—fight! We can command this place against a hundred!"

In his excitement he had partly raised himself from the ground.

But now his arm gave way beneath him, and he sank down heavily again.

Jonathan was full of grief.

"Don't mind me, guv'nor," said George—"don't mind me! Get all the weapons ready; I will lie here and load them while you fire!"

"But what's the good," said Jonathan, "if you are mortally wounded—what's the good? I may as well die too."

"Not a bit of it, guv'nor—not a bit of it! Besides, if we can only manage to disperse the officers, or even to drive them back for a short time, we may escape. Remember, there are several means of exit from these caverns, and I may not be so badly hurt as I at first thought."

He groaned again, however, while he spoke, and so seemed to give the lie to the words he had just uttered.

He pressed his hand tightly to his side.

But, nevertheless, the crimson tide came slowly oozing through his fingers.

His face grew whiter and whiter, and it was plain that his strength was going fast.

Jonathan had almost lost all heart.

But, taking up his pistols, he stood near the opening in the rock, ready to fire upon the officers, should a chance of doing so present itself.

CHAPTER DCCXXXV.

JONATHAN WILD IS HARDLY PRESSED BY HIS FOES, BUT RESOLVES UPON REVENGE.

THE presence of the officers near the cavern will, of course, be readily understood.

They were those who had been especially sent out upon the duty of capturing Jonathan Wild and his son.

The intimation they had received was an all-powerful one.

They knew that if they failed to accomplish their object the consequences would be very serious to them in more ways than one.

Besides, the amount of the rewards having been doubled was a great incentive to exertion, and, for once in a way, it must be said that they did their best.

But, then, for one thing, the whole of the force had been picked over and the best men selected for this important duty.

They had commenced their investigations at the old Manor House, and had gradually extended them until they reached the hills in which the caverns were situated.

From inquiries they had made of many persons, they learned of the existence of these strange cavernous places, and that they were believed to be the haunt of a band of robbers.

Being in possession of such information, it was only reasonable that they should jump to the conclusion that this was where Jonathan Wild had concealed himself.

At any rate, this seemed far more likely than any other place they had heard of, and therefore they resolved to make a search in that direction.

Even if they failed to find those they sought, they believed they should at least succeed in dispersing the robbers who had taken up their quarters there.

While forcing their way through the dense vegetation that clothed the sides of the hill, they heard some one

approaching, and, at a word from their leader, became in a moment perfectly still.

They waited and listened, and found that this person, whoever he might be, was gradually advancing towards them.

At last he was caught sight of, and instantly recognised as George Wild.

They rushed forward and endeavoured to seize him.

They called upon him to surrender, but without effect.

With a suddenness of movement, for which they were not prepared, George Wild turned round and fled.

A volley was sent after him, and, from the manner in which he staggered when hit, and the cry that issued from his lips, they knew well enough that he had been wounded.

It was only necessary for them to follow him up.

They were convinced they had got upon the right track at last, and their spirits rose accordingly.

Yet, in spite of his injuries, such was the speed that George Wild made that he quickly got out of both sight and hearing.

But this was chiefly because he had already become familiar with the ground.

The officers therefore laboured under a disadvantage in this respect, and, moreover, some time was lost in taking accurate note of which way he went.

The act of tracking him was not a very difficult one, however, for all the way he went, George left behind him a distinct mark of blood that could be followed up with comparative ease and rapidity.

They saw him pass through the hole in the side of the hill, but were not in time to prevent Jonathan from wedging in the piece of rock.

The officers, however, now felt that one sharp rush would probably do the business, and therefore, summoning up all their energies, they made a desperate attack upon the opening.

Despite its weight, the rock was moved from its position.

But no sooner was this done than they were rewarded with a couple of bullets that did immediate execution.

"Don't shrink," said the chief officer—"don't shrink! If you do, you will be picked off one by one! Rush forward before they have time to re-load!"

But Jonathan in the meanwhile had received from his son two more loaded pistols, and instantly discharged them, and with such good effect that two more police officers fell to the ground.

If anything could be calculated to enrage them more than another, this was, and they uttered loud and angry cries.

Jonathan, however, fought valiantly.

"We must retreat, George," he said, in a faint whisper—"we must retreat; we can hold this point no longer."

"Go, then, guv'nor—go. Make the best use of your legs you can, and leave me here; it's no good for me to make the attempt."

"It is—it is," said Jonathan. "I will not abandon you thus. Come! There, now, will not that be better?"

While speaking, he stooped down, and, with an extraordinary exertion of strength—a strength that was probably lent to him by the desperation of his situation—he lifted up his son in his arms, and carried him along the passage.

Considering the heavy burden he carried, the speed he made was wonderful.

But he knew that much depended upon the first start, and he hoped, amid the intricacies of the caverns, to baffle his pursuers.

Some little delay took place while the officers all made their way past the fragments of rock, but as soon as they were altogether in a body, they made a rush along the passage in the direction of the sounds of footsteps they could hear.

Coming up to a point where the caverns branched off in three directions, Jonathan paused, and drew a pistol from his belt.

The officers were close behind him, and as the passage was very narrow, they completely blocked it up.

He fired, and the loud cry that followed told that the bullet had done fearful execution.

He drew another pistol, and fired again, then turned down one of the passages.

His calculation was that those two shots would produce a slight delay, and that before the officers could recover themselves from it, he should have got so far as to be out of their earshot.

It was then more likely that they should take the wrong turning than the right one.

This calculation was proved to be correct.

The officers did take the wrong turning, for the sounds of their footsteps and voices grew fainter and fainter.

Then, with a heavy half-sigh, half-groan, he allowed the body of his son to slip to the ground.

For the last few moments he had found him growing heavier and heavier as he held him, and growing colder and colder every instant.

"George," he cried,—"George, tell me how you feel now! Are you better? Speak—speak quickly!"

A painful, gurgling sound was the only reply.

Jonathan shrieked out in his despair.

"George," he cried,—"George, one more word! Speak to me again!"

It was evident that Wild junior endeavoured to comply with this request, but he could not.

The rattling sound in his throat grew more and more painful to listen to.

Jonathan knew what it was, though he strove to cheat himself into disbelief.

It was the death rattle that he heard.

His son George was dying. Speech was already gone, and the last words that he would ever utter had passed his lips.

The loud cry to which Jonathan had given vent had reached the ears of the police officers, and made them aware of his position.

Their hasty footsteps could now be heard hastening towards him, and as he gazed in the direction, his face assumed the ferocious aspect of a beast of prey.

With a convulsive shuddering of the limbs, a gasp for breath, and a contortion of his whole frame, George Wild expired.

As soon as he knew that all was over, Jonathan sprang to his feet.

A fire seemed then to be raging in his brain.

Reason, reflection, and every other feeling had gone—he was conscious only of one thing, and that was that his son was dead, and had perished at the hands of the police officers.

An insane diabolical desire for vengeance then took possession of him.

"Revenge!" he murmured, hoarsely. "I will be revenged upon all—all! I will not die yet until I have been revenged, and most of all shall they suffer for George's death! Curses—curses on them all!"

He hastily reloaded his weapons, and then he turned to fly, for the officers were getting very close to him indeed.

It grieved him to leave his son lying where he was for the police officers to find him.

But it was impossible to do otherwise, and, moreover, this would doubtless prove some check to their progress.

His hideous countenance now assumed an expression of greater ferocity than ever.

One glance at it would have been sufficient to show that he was meditating a crime of more than usual enormity, but yet a crime for which he seemed to thirst.

"Blood—blood!" he cried. "I will have blood—nothing but that will calm the fury of my soul!"

He turned round hastily and darted along a narrow passage, the direction of which he well knew.

His speed was great, and it took him but a few moments to reach its extremity.

Then thrusting his weapons into his belt so as to have his hands at liberty, he stooped down and began to roll away a large stone.

It was a stone that he had removed on more than one occasion.

It was the one that guarded the entrance to the cavern where Edgworth Bess was confined.

His object may now be defined.

It was easy to guess who would be the first object of his insane revenge.

In her helpless, defenceless condition in that cavern,

with the officers some distance off, how could she escape the dreadful death that Jonathan Wild fully intended for her, and which he would not scruple for a moment to inflict?

CHAPTER DCCXXXVI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ARRIVE UPON THE SCENE OF ACTION AT THE OPPORTUNE MOMENT.

As soon as the opening was left free, Jonathan drew from his pocket a long dagger-like knife.

He ran his thumb along the edge as if to try its keenness.

Then with a nod apparently of satisfaction he went creeping in.

His motions much resembled those of a tiger.

Edgworth Bess no sooner caught sight of him when he entered the little circular cavern than she uttered a loud and fearful shriek—a cry that resounded through all the caverns.

"Curse you!" cried Jonathan, hoarse with rage. "You should die, if it was only for that sound. Yes, die—die! I have sworn to be revenged!"

He rushed forward, with the knife uplifted.

The poor girl saw her danger, and shrieked again.

"Help—help!" she cried—"help—help!"

Jonathan laughed exultingly.

"Cry for help," he said, "as much as you like, but none will come. We are here—here by ourselves; and your death is certain."

He sprang after and missed her only by a hair's breadth.

Edgworth Bess endeavoured to gain the opening leading from the cavern.

But Jonathan, with the speed of thought, divined her intention, and intercepted her.

"Now," he cried—"now—now I have you!"

He gave a bound forward, and he felt his hand rest upon her shoulder.

But at that moment there came a flash, followed by a loud report.

The knife fell from the nerveless grasp of Jonathan Wild, and he fell down in a huddled-up heap upon the floor of the cavern.

The shot was, in truth, a most opportune one.

But from whence had it come?

In order to explain this, it will be necessary to go back a little.

We must revert to the proceedings of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

It will be remembered that they had decided how they were to act, and had commenced their search with great energy and promptitude.

In going round in the manner they had determined, they came at length to that small open space on the hill-side where Jonathan and his son first had an encounter with the robbers.

Here they found signs of a struggle having recently taken place, and anything that looked like violence or bloodshed they immediately connected with the objects of their pursuit.

It was not long before they found the hole in the ground that had been so effectually stopped up by thrusting the trunk of a tree down it.

This was something that caused them a great deal of speculation; and it is very doubtful whether, aided by their own resources, they would have been able to come to a decision.

But while they were conversing with each other upon the subject, a low moaning sound attracted their attention.

They listened, and discovered the point from which the sound proceeded.

They hastened towards it, and discovered, lying concealed among the bushes, the body of a man.

He was evidently badly wounded—so badly, that at a glance Blueskin and Jack Sheppard saw they could do nothing for his assistance.

"Water—water!" he gasped. "If you have any kindness or compassion for me, bring me a little water, for I burn—I burn!"

"There's sure to be water near," said Jack Sheppard. "Wait a moment, and I will bring some if I can."

The man closed his eyes, and waited patiently.

Jack quickly found a little running stream, but for a moment was puzzled how he was to convey any to the wounded man.

He could only think of his hat, so, pulling it off, he dipped it into the stream, and so carried a small portion.

For this the man was profuse in terms of thankfulness, and Blueskin, wishing to put his gratitude to the test, asked him if he could explain the meaning of what they saw.

He answered in the affirmative, and made them acquainted with all those facts that the reader knows already, so that there is not the least necessity for repeating them here.

They listened with mingled surprise and delight.

At last they believed they had found what they were searching for.

Soon after giving this account, the man fell back, and, with a deep groan, expired.

He had told them that there were many ways of entering and leaving the caverns—that the hill was, in fact, completely hollowed out, and resembled a huge honeycomb.

"We are on the right track, depend upon it," said Blueskin. "Jonathan has taken up his quarters in these caverns, and, having done so, how easy it would be for him to carry off Edgworth Bess and confine her here!"

"Yes—that's it, no doubt."

"Come, then—we will commence our search at once, and try to find some other mode of entering."

So saying, they moved forward.

But before they had gone a dozen paces, Jack stumbled against something, and almost fell.

He could not see the nature of the obstruction, owing to the length of the grass.

"What's that?" he cried. "It feels to me almost like rope."

He stooped down, and found that he was correct.

A large coil of rope was lying on the ground.

"This may be a lucky discovery for us," said Blueskin. "At any rate, we will take it. We have no idea what these caverns are like, and a rope may be of the greatest utility. Doubtless it has been dropped or placed here by some of the robbers."

This was a very probable supposition indeed.

Blueskin picked up the rope, and slung it over his shoulder, and then commenced the ascent of the hill.

Upon gaining the summit, they heard the volley that was fired by the police officers at Wild junior.

They cautiously looked down, and quickly ascertained what had taken place.

"Come," said Blueskin, "fortune is favouring us. If we can only manage to get into these caverns by some other route, we may be able to intercept the villains in their flight. If they found us behind them and the officers in front, they, beyond a doubt, will surrender."

They watched the progress of the officers for some moments, and then, finding how resolute an attack they made, began to look about them for some means of entering the caverns.

While so engaged, they perceived in the ground before them an opening large enough to allow a man's body to pass through easily.

They hailed this discovery with a cry of delight.

"Depend upon it," cried Blueskin, "this is one of the entrances of which that man spoke."

Stooping down, they crawled cautiously to the edge of the orifice and looked down.

But the darkness was so intense that they could see nothing, nor could they form any idea of the depth of it.

"This rope will be the very thing," said Jack. "How lucky I found it! By the aid of it, we shall certainly be able to descend."

"We shall, indeed. Secure one end round the trunk of the tree, and then we will lower the other, and slip down with all speed."

This was done, and just as the preparations were completed a loud shriek came upon their ears.

No sooner did he hear it than Jack was almost frantic.

"That's Edgworth Bess," he exclaimed. "I am sure that's her voice. Perhaps Jonathan is murdering her! Quick—quick! Lend me the rope! At all risks, I will descend!"

With frantic speed he flung the coil of rope down the pit-like aperture.

Then, seizing hold of the rope with his hands, slipped down it at great speed.

He never stopped to reflect upon the danger he might be running, nor did he inquire of himself whether it was likely that the rope was long enough to reach to the bottom.

He only knew that Edgworth Bess was in great danger, and that, probably, a little promptitude of action on his part would save her.

It was Jack, then, who fired the bullet in the right moment.

In the dim sort of twilight that filled the cavern he saw the form of his old enemy Jonathan Wild, and perceived that he held a knife in his hand, and was about to strike.

On the impulse of the moment, then, he drew a pistol, and fired almost, it might be said, without taking any aim.

But yet, as it is often the case under such circumstances, the shot was a most effective one.

Scarcely had its reverberating echoes died away, than he stood upon the floor of the cavern.

Quick as thought he bounded forward to where Edgworth Bess had sunk upon the ground, and almost breathless with agitation, he raised her head and endeavoured to make her acquainted with his presence.

Blueskin was not much slower in his movements, and quickly slipped down the rope into the cavern.

CHAPTER DCCXXXVII.

JONATHAN WILD STRUGGLES HARD TO ESCAPE FROM HIS PURSUERS, AND MEETS WITH A SEVERE ACCIDENT.

JONATHAN WILD had been struck by Jack Sheppard's bullet, it is true, but, then, he quickly found that he was more frightened than hurt.

He saw Blueskin descending the rope, and knew there would be no hope for him unless he was very quickly on his feet again.

He was now quite driven to desperation, and therefore he made a headlong kind of rush from the cavern.

But before he quite plunged into the little narrow passage, he drew a pistol from his belt, and fired in the direction where he knew Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess to be.

He hoped the shot would take effect upon one or both of them.

Without waiting to know if such was the case, however, he turned swiftly round, and, considering his condition, ran very rapidly indeed.

He stopped short, however, as though by some extraordinary contrivance his progress had been suddenly arrested.

The fact was, he could hear the officers approaching in the direction he was going.

Looking about him, he saw another opening in the rock.

It was one that he had not as yet explored, and he had no very clear idea as to where it led.

But knowing that most of these passages ran one into the other, he did not hesitate to plunge down it.

Blueskin no sooner saw Jonathan disappear than he commenced an immediate pursuit after him.

He heard the officers approaching, and cried:

"This way—this way! Follow me, and we shall have him!"

He turned down the passageway as he spoke, the officers following quickly in his footsteps.

They could hear Jonathan Wild running on before them, and strained every nerve to follow him.

Yet, despite all their efforts, he kept the lead.

Suddenly, however, there came upon their ears a strange rushing sound, accompanied by a shrill scream of agony.

Then an instant silence, and a dull, heavy crash.

"He has fallen," shouted Blueskin, excitedly—"he has fallen! Lights—lights, and take care how you advance!"

The passageway was profoundly dark, and the officers, dreading something they knew not what, stopped as if by one accord, and produced their lanterns.

As there were several of them, a tolerable amount of illumination was shed around.

The passage was very narrow and very low.

"Advance cautiously," said Blueskin. "There must be some hole down which, in his blind speed, he has fallen."

This was proved to be the true solution of what had happened.

All at once the party of officers found themselves upon the brink of a precipice.

The passage terminated abruptly at the very edge of a kind of subterranean cliff.

In spite of themselves, they shuddered.

The bare thought of running along in the darkness with headlong speed, and then suddenly rushing over the brink of such a precipice was terrible to think of.

"Hark," said Blueskin—"hark!"

A faint groaning sound now came to their ears from below.

"He's there," said Blueskin—"hurt, and not killed. How deep is this pit?"

"Very deep, I fancy," said the officer, and, as he spoke, he picked up a small piece of stone, and tossed it in.

There was a clattering sound as the fragment of rock rebounded from one side of the pit to the other, and then, with a clear, sharp sound, it struck against the bottom.

"It is deep," said the officer, shivering. "He must be bruised to a mass. I wonder how it is that he is still alive!"

A consultation then took place as to what should be done next.

Certainly it was their duty to descend, and make Jonathan Wild their prisoner.

His bodily condition had nothing to do with them.

If dead, why, his body must be recovered, so the debate was quickly put an end to.

"A rope is wanted," said the officer. "But where on earth are we to find it?"

Blueskin in a moment directed them to the one by which he had gained admission to the caverns, and a couple of men were immediately despatched to fetch it.

As they had to go to the top of the hill, some time necessarily elapsed before they returned.

As much time as possible, however, was saved, for while some went above others went beneath, and, as soon as the rope was untied from the trunk of the tree, it was allowed to fall down.

Upon going to the edge of the pit again, it soon became evident that there was no place there to which the rope could be attached.

But Blueskin said:

"If you all grasp it tightly, you will be able to support the weight of one man easily."

One end of the rope was lowered, and the men held fast by the other.

There would doubtless have been a little consultation as to who should descend first, but Blueskin prevented it by suddenly stepping over the edge.

The chief officer was by no means pleased with this proceeding, and began to inquire who Blueskin was.

No one could tell him anything about it, however.

It was by no means a pleasant task to descend by that rope, yet Blueskin did not mind that in the least.

He quickly reached the end, and then clung tightly with his hands.

He felt about below him with his feet, but could feel nothing of the bottom.

"Hullo!" he cried, shouting to those above.

The officer appeared over the brink with a lantern.

"Can you let me down any lower?" asked Blueskin.

"A foot or two perhaps."

"Try it then. I can't feel the bottom."

The rope was lowered a little, but the bottom seemed as far off as ever.

It might have been perfectly safe to have dropped from such a distance.

But then Blueskin had no clear idea as to the actual depth of the pit, and he naturally shrank from it.

"The rope is too short," he cried, "it will not reach to the bottom. Draw me up again quickly."

The officers worked with a will, and soon drew him to the top.

He climbed over the edge, and then lay down upon the ground much exhausted.

"A long rope ladder or something of that kind must be obtained," he said, "and one very much longer than that piece of rope."

"I suppose there is no other resource?" said the chief officer.

"None whatever. Let some one be dispatched for it, and let some others remain here at the brink of the pit on guard."

This was at once agreed to.

"Excuse me," said the chief officer, addressing himself to Blueskin, "but this place is so confoundingly dark that I cannot see your face, and I don't know to whom I am addressing myself."

"Don't trouble yourself on that account," said Blueskin, "there is no need; let it be sufficient to say that I am here by the special command of the Lord Chancellor, who sent me to see how you performed your duty, and who will be guided greatly by the report that I shall make, and I may as well tell you at once that I shall not omit to inform him of the very energetic and skilful manner in which you have conducted the pursuit up to the present moment."

CHAPTER DCCXXXVIII.

THE OFFICERS MEET WITH A VERY GREAT SURPRISE UPON REACHING THE BOTTOM OF THE PIT.

The officer made quite a deep and respectful bow upon receipt of this announcement.

"Certainly, sir—certainly," he said. "I am very much obliged to you indeed, and of course you will excuse me for making the inquiry I did."

"Yes, of course; it was quite right and natural on your part. However, respecting this rope ladder, had you not better see to it at once, for the sooner Jonathan is got out of the pit the better?"

"You are quite right, sir; I will see to it at once; but a considerable delay must of necessity take place."

"I fear so; but, at the same time, it will be wise not to leave this spot, for Jonathan Wild is a man of so many resources, that there is no saying what he might do."

"But it's my opinion, sir," said the chief officer, "that he is now past doing anything but groan. No one could survive such a terrific fall as that. No; we may safely consider him our prisoner now. He will be no more trouble to us or anyone else."

"I hope not," said Blueskin.

The rope ladder was sent for, and the remainder of the officers assembled round the mouth of the cave.

Here Blueskin left them to return to the cave where he believed Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess to be.

He arrived just in time to find them leaving it.

The shot that Jonathan had fired was a useless one, though the bullet had passed close to both.

Edgworth Bess was not only much overcome by her sudden and unexpected deliverance, but also by finding herself at last in company with her two old friends and protectors.

In a few words Blueskin made Jack acquainted with what had befallen Jonathan Wild, and then he said:

"Now, Jack, we cannot be too cautious. Remember how terrible is the nature of our position. Let us return to the Manor House with all speed. There, I believe, we can remain in safety until we can decide what we shall do in the future. Jonathan Wild is now past doing any injury to anyone, so we may safely leave him. We will watch the course of events. Poor wretch, I wish he was out of his misery."

Jack did but acquiesce entirely in what his companion had said.

Without the least molestation or difficulty, they made their way to the Manor House, where the servants were all glad enough to see their mistress return.

By Blueskin's advice, a messenger was at once despatched to the Lord Chancellor, letting him know that she had escaped.

It was indeed a happy meeting between those three persons who had been so long separated from each other. Edgworth Bess showed that change in her position had not by any means effected a corresponding change in her disposition.

She was just the same then as she always was—only

delighted to think that she was able to be of effectual assistance to her old protectors.

It was agreed on all sides, however, that the consultation for their future proceedings should be postponed for a short time—until, in fact, Jonathan Wild's fate should be decided.

The officer was unable to obtain what he wanted nearer than London, and consequently had to ride all the way there for it.

Then no rope ladder could be found long enough, but several were obtained and joined together.

With this load he returned to the caverns.

But in those days travelling was a very different thing to what it is now, and consequently nearly twenty-four hours elapsed before the rope was in readiness to be used.

"Come," said the officer, "down with it. We shall have the trouble of bringing up his dead body, and no more; it is impossible for him to have remained there in such a mangled condition as he was. Have you not heard him groaning lately, or moving?"

"No; for many hours all has been as silent as the grave. Depend upon it, he's dead."

The rope ladder was held securely by the bulk of the officers, and the one in command, after some little hesitation, began to descend.

It was very much easier to descend by this ladder than it was to go down by a rope merely, and in a short time he had the satisfaction of feeling his feet touch the bottom.

The ladder was plenty long enough and to spare, for it lay coiled up in a great heap on the ground.

The officer then unhooked his lantern from his belt, and flashed the light around him.

The bottom of the pit was very much larger than the top—in fact, the appearance of the place seemed to be that of a huge inverted funnel.

He expected, of course, to find the body of Jonathan in an instant.

But he did not.

Therefore, in some anxiety, he continued to flash the light round about in various directions.

Still there was nothing to be seen, except a few drops of blood here and there.

With a very uncomfortable feeling in his breast, the officer rapidly searched all the bottom of the pit, and then shouted aloud to those above.

"He's gone," he cried—"disappeared by some means or other."

This unexpected intelligence was received with such a shock of surprise by those above, that it was a great wonder they did not let go their hold upon the ladder.

The officer was scarcely less alarmed, and he looked about him nervously.

It was a strange position to be in at the bottom of the pit, and all manner of superstitious thoughts, to which he had been hitherto a stranger, came crowding into his mind.

"Quick!" he bawled to his men above—"be quick, will you? Fasten the ladder in some way, and come down. He cannot be far off; but, far or near, we must find him."

Surprise now gave place to curiosity in the breasts of the officers above, and therefore with some ingenuity they secured the rope ladder, and one by one descended.

As they all carried lanterns, the interior of the pit was well illuminated, and it was again rigidly examined.

It took only a moment, however, for them to come unhesitatingly to the conclusion that Jonathan Wild was not there.

"He must have crawled into some nook," said the chief officer—"he cannot have done anything else. So badly wounded as he is, he could not possibly escape.

And now it could be seen that there were several little archways near to the ground, that were just about large enough to allow a man to crawl beneath them.

These arches were one by one examined, and at last the chief officer cried:

"Ah! we are on the right track at last. Look! there's blood on the stone—he has gone this way."

The officers all crowded round him, and then, in a loud voice, he cried:

"Jonathan Wild, we know you to be there, and we know you to be badly wounded. Surrender, then, at once, and we will do you no further injury; but if you

resist, the consequences of that resistance be upon your own head!"

No response whatever was made to this speech, and the officer looked around him rather puzzled and bewildered.

"He may have crawled a good way off, sir," said one, "or he may have got a little way in and died."

CHAPTER DCCXXXIX.

THE POLICE OFFICERS CONTINUE THEIR UNAVAILING SEARCH AFTER JONATHAN WILD.

EITHER of these were very probable suppositions, and, by way of testing them, the chief officer drew his sword, and cautiously thrust it under the archway.

He moved it about in various directions, but found no opposition to it, except such as the sides of the little passage gave.

He continued to thrust it in further and further, until the full length of his arm was reached.

Still he met with no obstruction.

"Come," he said, "there's no help for it. We must crawl through this place, and see where it leads. Which of you will volunteer for the duty?"

The officers all shrunk back.

Not one of them liked the idea of entering that place, which was only just about large enough for their bodies.

They would be, in a manner of speaking, wedged in a tube, and, for aught they knew, Jonathan might be lying at a distance off ready with his pistol in his hand.

If he fired he could not fail to hit his mark.

Finding none of his men willing, the chief officer said:

"I am ashamed of you; but I will show you an example."

He sank down on his hands and knees as he spoke, and rapidly crawled under the archway.

His men, now really ashamed of themselves, followed him with all speed.

After going a few yards the officer, to his very great satisfaction, found that the passage changed its character.

It became both higher and broader, so that in a short time he was able to walk erectly along it.

He flashed the light of the lantern all about him.

He could see and hear nothing of Jonathan Wild.

That after having been wounded, and after such a frightful fall as that, he should have been able to crawl away seemed absolutely incredible.

But then, from what we know of Jonathan Wild's nature, we may conclude that he would fight to the very last gasp.

Then the officer came to a halt, for he found the passage branched off in two different directions, and he was at a loss which one to take.

He would have remained for some time in uncertainty had he not caught sight of a spot of blood that decided him.

"Come," he said, "we shall have him soon! This is the way!"

But the officer found before long that the fresh air was blowing upon his face, and, continuing his progress still further and further, he presently found himself standing at one side of the hill.

From this it was pretty evident that Jonathan had had strength to crawl out, and where he might be just at that precise moment of time would be hard indeed to say.

The officers quickly formed themselves around their leader, and looked inquiringly into his countenance, wondering what they were to do next.

It was dark, though dawn might be expected to come ere long, and therefore they were unable to see about them.

"Curse him!" said the officer. "I never dreamt that he would be so much trouble as this. I made sure that we had captured him. Look about, all of you, with your lanterns, and as soon as you find the least trace of blood let me know—it's the only chance we have."

The officers saw this at once, but for a long time their search was unavailing.

Either Jonathan Wild's wound had not bled much, or else he had bound it up securely.



[THE POLICE OFFICERS SEARCHING FOR JONATHAN WILD.]

All at once, they uttered a loud shout.

Their chief rushed towards them.

"Look," said one, pointing to a large dock leaf; "there's a spot of blood, and it seems to me as though it had been very lately made."

"Yes, he's passed this way," said the chief officer, "and not long ago. Persevere, my lads, and we shall have him, after all, and then we shall be well paid for all our trouble."

That was the last spot of blood they found, however; and when day dawned, and they were able to see about them better, they seemed further off the capture of Jonathan Wild than they had yet been.

This was in good truth a most vexatious circumstance for all concerned, as, not without reason, they had considered the pursuit to be virtually over.

One great cause for their rage was that they believed No. 156.—BLUESKIN.

Jonathan Wild was determined to do them out of the reward.

He might make up his mind to crawl into some obscure place and there die.

He might lie there undiscovered for years and years, and, of course, until his body was produced they could not claim the reward that was offered for his apprehension.

It was just such a trick as Jonathan was likely to perform; indeed, he would do anything to escape the hangman's rope.

In the morning, however, when it grew broad daylight, the officers spread themselves out and searched with great energy and perseverance.

They were determined not to lose him if they could possibly help it.

All their searching and inquiring was in vain, however

Had Jonathan Wild been suddenly spirited away, his disappearance could not have been more complete and inscrutable.

The nature of the country around, however, was admirably adapted for concealment.

The trees were numerous and grew thickly together, and between them all there was a great quantity of various kinds of tangled underwood, amid which a man might lie concealed, and almost bid defiance to the closest searching.

As hour after hour passed away, and the sun rose higher and higher in the heavens without bringing them any nearer, that they could see, to the conclusion of their task, the officers' spirits deserted them, and they no longer searched with that energy that had previously characterised their movements.

Indeed, it would be hard to conceive anything more disheartening.

Their disappointment was all the greater because they had made so perfectly certain of success.

As for the chief officer, he was furious with rage, and wished, from the bottom of his heart, that the pit had only been deep enough to put an end to Jonathan Wild's life.

Then the sun began to go down and twilight to creep over the face of nature.

Night was again coming on, and if, after all that long day's search, aided by the light of the sun, they had failed to accomplish their purpose, how could they hope for any better success in the darkness?

"We must give up for the present," said the chief officer, in tones of the deepest chagrin. "It cannot be helped, but we must rest ourselves; and when we are not so tired as we are now we may be able to meet with success."

This seemed very doubtful.

The officers were all worn out with hard work and want of sleep.

Many hours had elapsed since they had closed their eyes last, and therefore, although most anxious to apprehend Jonathan Wild, yet they gladly enough obeyed their superior's mandate to desist for a short time.

CHAPTER DCCXL.

DESCRIBES THE MANNER IN WHICH JONATHAN WILD EFFECTED HIS ESCAPE FROM THE CAVERNS.

WHEN Jonathan Wild, flying madly along the dark cavernous passage, suddenly found that there was no longer any resting-place for his feet, he failed to realise the full extent of his tremendous position.

The first shock of his fall deprived him for an instant of his senses, and yet not before he had time to utter that fearful yell that let his pursuers know that some accident had happened to him.

The change was so sudden and so great that it was hardly indeed to realise it.

One moment he had been flying at full speed, and even distancing his pursuers—had been in what might be called in full possession of all his physical energies, and the next he was lying at the bottom of that abyss a bruised and mangled mass, unable to stir hand or foot.

The pain he suffered was most excruciating, and it was in good truth a thousand wonders that the fall did not produce immediate death.

Yet there was the dreadful consciousness over him that he must be there until his foes found some safer means of getting down to him.

Then he would fall into their hands perfectly helpless.

It was a dreadful feeling for him to have, and, in spite of his pain, he gnashed his teeth with rage and disappointment, while muttered curses escaped his lips.

Then the rope was sent for, as we have described.

His intellects were then too much confused for him to understand all that was going on above.

Yet he was able to form some idea.

Every minute, however, he continued to revive, until at last he began to think that he was not hurt by any means so seriously as he had in the first instance imagined.

Then again he heard voices.

The rope was lowered, and Blueskin descended.

He heard him speak, and recognised him in a moment, although the officers had failed to do so.

That, then, he thought was his fate.

He was to lie there like some bruised and wounded reptile until his enemy should reach his side and make him prisoner without resistance.

He strained his eyes, and through the darkness fancied he could see the dusky form descending, and so firmly was he impressed with this idea that he wished ardently that he had at least one of his pistols left loaded.

If he had possessed one he most certainly would have fired.

To reload he considered was out of the question.

As yet he had not tried to move, and dreaded to make the attempt.

He had seen others fall from great heights on more than one occasion, and he knew that it often happened that while they lay in that position in which they had fallen they were comparatively free from pain.

But as soon as they moved, the anguish caused was intolerable.

Still continuing to look up, he felt quite certain that he could see Blueskin coming down.

Closer and closer he came, until his feet were within a few inches of him—twelve at the most.

And then he stopped.

Had Blueskin known how near the rope was to the bottom he would at all risks have let go, and then the capture of Wild would have been certain.

But that knowledge, of course, he could not obtain.

The risk was too great to think of dropping to an unknown depth, and therefore he gave the signal to be drawn up again.

It was wonderful what a reviving effect this had upon Jonathan Wild.

He began to think that, after all, he was going to be allowed the opportunity of making his escape.

Providing he only summoned up his courage for the effort, a chance was now afforded him, for he rightly enough guessed that some time would elapse before his foes would be able to make another descent.

He strained his ears to the utmost, hoping to catch what was said, as soon as Blueskin reached the top again, and he succeeded in ascertaining that it was their intention to dispatch one of their number to London for a rope ladder.

Then indeed did Jonathan's heart begin to beat with hope.

No one knew better than he how long it would take to send to London and come back.

What a long time he would be unmolested by his foes.

What a chance for him to attempt to make his escape.

Yes, that was the word that was now more prominently before his mind than any other, and, despite the extreme dread he had of making any movement, he slowly began to crawl away from the spot where he had fallen.

Judging from the general aspect of the caverns, he concluded that there must be some means or other of escaping from the place down which he had fallen.

It never once occurred to him that it might be a pit, as it really was.

He thought it merely a sudden alteration in the elevation, and that the character of the caverns would be unchanged.

Above all was he delighted to find that the act of crawling forward did not increase his pain, and this fact was of a most reassuring nature, since it went far towards convincing him that his injuries were by no means so great as he at first thought them.

Creeping onwards, too, he found that the ground beneath his feet was not hard and rocky, but soft and moist, and this had broken the force of his fall to a very great extent.

He had nothing but his sense of feeling to guide him.

But chance favoured him so far as to take him direct to a small arch that appeared to be the entrance to the passage.

Here he paused a little while, and as he did so he felt the fresh air blowing strongly and freely upon his face, and this caused the blood to circulate with great speed through his veins.

"I shall yet be free," he muttered to himself—"free to wreak my revenge upon my foes, although I have met with so serious a check. I am maimed and crippled, no doubt, yet if I can only accomplish the purpose of my life I care not. When my revenge is complete, death may come as soon as it thinks proper. And I will have revenge, too!" he added, with more vehemence of manner—"revenge for the death of my son George! Yes—yes, they shall suffer for it!"

He then began to draw himself along the passage.

At first the sharp points descending from the roof tore his clothes and flesh, but after going a few paces the aspect of the passage changed entirely.

It was both high and wide.

Creeping on slowly and yet steadily, Jonathan Wild at length reached the open air, and having done so, he fell forward at full length, completely exhausted.

He must have relapsed into a state of insensibility, as for a long time he was unconscious not only of all that was going on around him, but what had last happened.

Pain restored him to his senses, however, and then such dreadful curses came from his cracked and bleeding lips as would have made the most depraved shudder with horror.

Then, like some wounded snake, he began to creep away from the entrance of the cavern among the thick brushwood that was around.

Painfully and slowly he forced his way until he had placed a considerable distance between himself and the side of the hill.

Every now and then he was compelled to rest, and each time when he started it was more feebly and slowly.

His strength was all but spent.

At last, by dint of terrible exertions, the edge of a road was reached.

Before him flowed a little clear, sparkling brook, and, with a cry of delight, he rolled himself completely over into it, and allowed the water to flow over him from head to foot.

CHAPTER DCCXLI.

JONATHAN WILD MEETS UNEXPECTEDLY WITH SUBSTANTIAL ASSISTANCE.

THE water was intensely cold, and consequently produced a numbing effect upon him.

In one moment he was free from that distracting, smarting pain that had before driven him almost mad.

His throat was parched, and his mouth burning, and so he drank in huge draughts of the clear, running water.

Then, just raising his head sufficiently above the level of the stream to breathe, he still allowed the remaining portion of his body to be immersed.

His teeth chattered with the cold; but he bore it with indifference.

In comparison to the pain of his wound it was as nothing.

How long he may have remained thus he could scarcely tell; but all at once he was brought back to a better idea of his position by hearing a rattling sound produced by the approach of some vehicle along the road.

Even this he listened to at first with indifference.

But soon he began to be aware that it might be of the utmost importance to him.

"It's on two wheels," he said, with chattering teeth, "and drawn by one horse. I wonder who it can be?—not any of my foes, surely? No, no—they would not come in such a guise as that."

He raised himself rather higher out of the stream, and, looking down the dusty road, he saw, at a great distance off, a kind of light cart on two wheels, drawn by a powerful, bony-looking horse, which was travelling at a rapid rate.

In the vehicle—which otherwise appeared to be empty—was a man of rather large proportions.

Jonathan looked at the cart wistfully.

"If my pistols were only loaded," he thought, "I might shoot that wretch and take possession of that horse and cart; I should then have something like a chance of getting away from my foes; but I am not able. Curse him—curse him!"

Jonathan Wild looked upon everyone as an enemy.

He was at war with the whole human race, and there could be no disputing the fact that it would have given him an intense amount of pleasure if he could by any means have wrought the death of the man who was approaching, although he had never seen him in his life before, and had certainly done him no injury.

As the cart came nearer, other thoughts were flitting through Wild's mind.

By the expression of his face, it could have been told that he was coming to a decision, and about to adopt a particular line of conduct.

When the cart had got tolerably close to him, he raised himself a little out of the water and groaned faintly, yet loud enough to enable the man in the cart to hear it distinctly.

Then he groaned again.

The horse heard it, for the animal swerved suddenly to the other side of the road.

"Help," cried Jonathan, feebly—"help me for the love of humanity!"

The man in the cart looked about him for a moment before he could make out just where the sound came from.

Then he saw the form of some one struggling in the ditch by the roadside.

He was a compassionate man, for in a moment he stopped the cart, and, jumping down, hastened to the side of the brook.

"What is it?" he asked. "How came you there?"

"Help," said Wild—"help me to get out! I am almost exhausted!"

Without more ado, the stranger seized him by the hands and drew him out of the water.

When he was able to take a good view of the person he had succoured, he was by no means pleased with what he had done.

"You've met with an accident, I suppose?" he said, rather gruffly.

"I have," moaned Wild—"a dreadful accident! I have been within the merest trifle of losing my life. You see I yet live; and yet perhaps it would have been better if I had died, for I question whether I shall be able to straighten myself again."

"How did it happen?"

"Why, you see, sir, I was travelling along on horseback; it was a resive creature, yet I have always been able to manage it pretty well; but it was startled at something—I know not what—and threw me off. I ought to have disengaged myself from the stirrups, but did not; my foot caught in one of them, and I have been dragged a long way along the road; I have been kicked and trodden on, too, so that I am suffering from a complication of injuries. At last, I got my foot at liberty, and then rolled over into that stream, out of which I have not had strength to get."

This was about as plausible an account of himself as Jonathan Wild could have given, and certainly such an accident as he described would be likely to produce effects similar to those the stranger beheld.

"Help me—have mercy upon me!" said Wild. "I am in a dreadful state, and yet I was riding on an errand of life and death! I don't like to ask you for such a thing, or to trouble you; I should have preferred that you had volunteered: yet if you would let me ride in your cart a little way—"

"But how do you know whether I am going your way or not?" asked the stranger, who did not seem inclined to render any further assistance to Jonathan.

"I guess you are," said Wild, "from the direction you are taking. Where are you bound to?"

"Sedgfield."

"Sedgfield?" said Jonathan, pretending to consider. "Yes, that will do. I am going further on than that; but there I could, no doubt, obtain such assistance as my hurts require."

"Oh, no doubt you can!" was the gruff reply.

"Then, good sir, help me in your vehicle; let me lie at the bottom of it. I shall be ever thankful to you, and I wish I had the means of rewarding you as I should like."

Jonathan grinned ferociously, for he thought just then the reward he would have liked to bestow was a bullet or a stab with a knife.

Although he kept his calmness so well, yet inwardly he

was cursing the man for his churlish uncharitable-ness.

Such a demand as this was one that scarcely anyone could refuse to comply with, and therefore, in spite of a manifest unwillingness, the stranger stated his intention of giving Wild a ride.

Jonathan was profuse in the expression of his gratitude.

With much difficulty, he was lifted up into the cart, and, scrambling over the side, sank down quite helpless and exhausted upon the bottom of it.

"I fear I am dying," he groaned—"yes, yes—I fear I am dying! Water—water! Have you any water?"

"Water be blowed!" said the man, as gruffly as before. "It strikes me you've had too much of it, and that's what's the matter with you. Here—try this, and I hope it'll do you good, for I don't want a dead body in my cart, I can promise you!"

CHAPTER DCCXLII.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS THAT THE OFFICERS ARE MUCH CLOSER UPON HIS TRACK THAN HE IMAGINES.

WHILE speaking, the stranger produced from his pocket a black bottle.

Jonathan seized it with avidity, and, placing it to his lips, drank heartily of its contents.

He found the liquid to be brandy, and he was accustomed to partake of it in surprising quantities.

The stranger was astonished when he found how long Jonathan kept the bottle to his lips.

At length his patience being exhausted, he snatched it away, and Jonathan sank back in the cart, and gasped once or twice for breath.

"I do believe you would have gone on drinking that brandy till it finished you," said the stranger. "You had enough at once to kill anybody. Pray how do you feel?"

"Better," said Wild, and there was such a marked change in the manner in which he pronounced this word that the stranger fairly started back in surprise.

"Yes," said Wild, "I feel much better. New life seems to circulate in all my veins. Thanks—many thanks for your kindness! I shall be able to reach Sedgfield now."

"Well, it is to be hoped you will. Are you all ready?"

"Yes," cried Jonathan.

"Then we'll make a start."

The man climbed up into the cart, and sat down.

In another moment they were rolling along the high-road at a rattling pace, and every yard that they went Jonathan Wild seemed to improve, for he knew that he was going further and further from his foes.

The jolting of the cart was, however, something fearful, and it required all his stoicism to bear up against it.

In spite of himself, groans would every now and then escape his lips—groans of such a character as would make the stranger start and turn pale.

"Don't make that awful noise," he said, once or twice. "It does not do you any good, I'm sure."

"It's the jolting of the cart," said Jonathan. "It seems as though it would shake me limb from limb. Curse the hand that made it, say I!"

"Well, you seem a nice sort of customer," said the stranger, "whoever you may be. But I suppose that's no business of mine."

"No, it isn't. I am what I have told you, and you can believe me or not, as you think proper."

The stranger whipped his horse.

He was anxious to reach Sedgfield as quickly as possible.

The more he saw of his strange companion the less he liked him, and the more anxious he was to get rid of him out of the cart.

For some time a complete silence reigned between them.

Jonathan Wild no longer groaned, from which it may be inferred that he was getting used to the jolting.

Suddenly, however, he fancied he heard, over and above the horrible rattling of the cart, another sound that struck dismay to his heart.

Slowly and painfully, he raised himself up sufficiently to look over the back of the cart.

He was careful to show only the top of his head, and then looked carefully down the road.

In the distance he could see a cloud of dust, and he could hear the clatter of horses' hoofs.

Without waiting for further consideration, he jumped in a moment to the conclusion that they were police officers who were approaching.

What was to be done?

He sank down to the bottom of the cart in despair.

So overcome was he by this unexpected incident that he did not seem to have the heart left to make another movement.

But the love of life and the desire to preserve his liberty came strongly over him, and, again raising his head, he looked over the back of the cart.

To his delight, the officers—if such they were—were no longer in sight.

A turn in the road hid them from his view.

"Stop—stop!" said Jonathan to the man who was driving—"stop—stop, I say! Oh, curses!"

"What's the matter?"

"Let me out—let me out!" said Jonathan. "I can go no further! The jolting of your cart is beyond all endurance! Let me get down! I must remain on the roadside, although my business is so very—very urgent!"

The man wanted no urging whatever—he was quite glad to get rid of his unwelcome companion, and therefore stopped the horse at once.

"I will help you down," he said, "and I hope you will soon be better."

"I'm afraid," said Jonathan—"I'm afraid death is coming! Yes, death is surely coming!"

The stranger assisted him from the cart, and, by Wild's request, led him to the side of the road.

"There," he said, "I will sit here on this bank till I can recover myself a little. There's one favour, however, that you can do for me."

"What is it?"

"It's not far to Sedgfield now, is it?"

"Not more than four miles."

"Then drive on rapidly, and, when you get there, make a surgeon acquainted with my condition. Tell him where to find me, and ask him to make haste, or I shall perish by the way."

"Oh, yes—I'll do that with the best heart in the world!" said the stranger.

"Make haste, then—make haste!"

"I am."

Jonathan was excessively anxious for the man to start, as the clattering of horses' hoofs now became frightfully distinct.

The man resumed his seat, and, giving the horse a cut with the whip, started off at fresh speed, and in less than a moment disappeared round another bend in the road.

No sooner was he out of sight than, summoning up all his strength and powers of endurance, Jonathan Wild climbed up the bank, and forced his way through the hedge.

He was only just in time, for his feet had scarcely disappeared when the officers came riding by.

They were police officers—he could see that now plainly enough—not, as he believed, the officers who had attacked him in the caverns, but some that had been sent off in pursuit of him.

They rode on without slackening speed, and Wild drew a long breath of relief at the narrow escape he had had.

"They will question that man in the cart—the chances are a thousand to one that they will do it. I must find some other means of providing for my safety. Oh, curse these wounds! But for them I could get away easily!"

With more strength than would have been believed possible, Jonathan crawled rapidly across the field on the other side of the hedge, and made his way into another beyond.

This was slightly elevated, so he took advantage of the fact to look towards the road.

To his surprise, then, he saw in the distance the cart in which he had been riding.

It was again at a standstill, and the officers were clustered around.

Of course he could not make out a single word that was said, yet, from the gestures that were made, he had no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that the officers were hearing a full account of him and his late proceedings.

With dreadful curses coming from his lips, he remained there watching them, wondering what course they would pursue.

At length he saw the man in the cart turn round.

He was accompanied by the officers.

"I know what he's going to do," said Jonathan—"know it as well as if I heard them speak. He's going to show them just the spot where I got out of the cart. They will soon be upon me. What—oh, what shall I do in order to escape?"

CHAPTER DCCXLIII.

JONATHAN WILD IS MORTIFIED TO FIND THAT HIS CUNNING HIDING-PLACE IS DISCOVERED.

DESPAIRINGLY Jonathan cast his eyes around him, looking for some place of refuge, and hoping to find it.

Yet, in his maimed state, unable to move quickly, how was he to conceal himself in such a place as he was then?

All around him he could see nothing but smooth green meadows, where it would be impossible for anyone to hide.

At the first glance almost he saw he would be detected.

His foes would swarm around him—seize him in many places, before he had the least chance of making any resistance.

He could see no hiding-place at all, and yet, animated wholly by the desire to get as far from his enemies as he could, he continued to crawl painfully onward.

Then all at once he came to a sheet of water of tolerable extent.

He had not seen it earlier, because on all sides the ground shelved down precipitously to it.

So calm and beautiful the water looked—so clear and bright, that Jonathan felt an almost irresistible impulse stealing over him to plunge into its cool depths, and there remain until his life was at an end.

Yet, although he had nothing to live for, he could not make up his mind to encounter death.

He shook his head slowly, and the thought of suicide was dismissed.

But he remembered the adventure he had had a little while ago, and that put a fresh thought into his mind.

He noticed that in many places, and more especially round the edges, there were large tufts of reeds growing in this pool, the tops of which rose up a considerable height above the surface.

They were very dense, too—so dense that no one could see through them.

The thought then occurred to Jonathan—could he gently lower himself into the water, and contrive to reach one of these tufts of reeds?

If so, he could cling to them, and so keep his face out of the water, while the remainder of his body was immersed.

Surely the officers would never think of looking for him there.

They might search all round the pool, and yet not find him.

The more he thought of this plan the better was the opinion he formed of it, and, without further hesitation, he proceeded to carry it into execution.

Choosing that portion of the bank that was closest to the largest tuft of reeds, Jonathan slowly committed himself to the water.

He waded in as far as he could, and just when the water reached his throat he was within arm's-length of the tuft of reeds.

With little difficulty, then, he managed to crawl in among them.

They were slimy and disagreeable to the touch, and caused a loathing sensation to come over him.

But he mastered it, and grew reconciled to his position, for he believed it would be the means of saving him from his foes.

The reeds closed quickly round him.

In the water, they seemed as lithe and supple as so many snakes.

To his heated imagination it really seemed as though they twined themselves around his body, and so supported him.

His face alone remained above the level of the water, and he was careful to draw all around it the reeds in such a manner that he could not catch a glimpse of the water beyond.

He knew that while this was the case it would be quite impossible for his enemies to see him, as the tops of the reeds rose high above him.

Not long after he had taken up this situation, he heard the trampling of feet and the sound of many voices.

"It's very odd," he heard some one say, in a loud voice—"very odd indeed! Surely you must have made a mistake? You have not taken us to the right place, or else he was not so bad as you describe."

"Well, I don't know about that," said another voice in reply, and Jonathan could tell at once it was the man who was speaking. "I am quite certain I brought you to the right place, however; but whether he was only shamming to be very bad, or whether he really was so, is more than I can take upon myself to say."

"Well, it's most extraordinary where he can be," said the officer. "From the description you gave me, I feel certain he is Jonathan Wild."

"It seems as though he had melted into air," said the stranger. "I never was so surprised in my life. I quite expected to find him sitting down on the bank just where I left him."

"He's lurking about somewhere," said the officer—"perhaps under our very noses. I shouldn't wonder if he isn't listening to every word we are saying at the present moment."

"But how could that be? There's nowhere here where a man could hide, I'm sure."

The officer looked about him.

"He might be in the pool," he said.

"Well, he might, if he's drowned himself; and now you speak of it, it was in the water where I first found him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; he was lying down almost covered over by the water—that is, in a little brook you may have noticed running by the side of the road. He told me a long tale about being thrown from his horse, and so forth; so I pulled him out of the stream, for he pretended to be unable to get out of it himself."

"Well, I can't make it out," said the officer. "We can't drag the pool, that's certain, nor go all over it; but we can take a careful look all round."

At these words, Jonathan's heart sank within him.

Surely, he thought, the officers, in searching round, would find some trace of his footsteps upon the bank.

He could hear them walk all round the edge of the water, and at length he heard the one who had previously spoken say:

"Well, I don't believe he's in the pool. There's no marks anywhere round it, and the water is so clear that I could almost see him if he was at the bottom."

Jonathan's courage rose again.

But it soon sank down deeper and deeper than ever.

"Look at those great tufts of reeds," said the stranger. "Why, he might get among those, and hide himself easily."

Oh, what a vindictive feeling came over Jonathan Wild at that moment!

What exquisite pleasure it would have given him could he have inflicted some most painful, lingering death upon the man who had just discovered his hiding-place!

He was, then, quite powerless, and all he could do was to remain perfectly still, and to trust to his good luck to remain undiscovered.

"Well, he might be among them," said the officer, "and yet it seems to me to be hardly likely. I wonder how we can find out? If we had a boat, now, it would be easy."

"But we have not one," said the stranger, "and so you must adopt some other expedient. Why not get boldly into the water, and swim round?"

"For a very good reason, my friend—I don't know how

to swim, and am not sorry for it, for I should not fancy the job."

"Can any of your men swim?"

"I doubt it; if they could they would be sure to deny it, for they know Jonathan Wild too well to feel inclined to go swimming among the reeds looking for him. If they found him, they would make the discovery in anything but a pleasant manner."

"Then I'll tell you what to do," said the stranger. "Get your pistols, and fire a few volleys at the reeds. If he is there, we shall soon find out."

"A good thought," said the officer—"a very good thought indeed!"

CHAPTER DCCXLIV.

THE POLICE OFFICERS FIRE AT THE TUFTS OF REEDS UPON THE SURFACE OF THE POOL.

Is it possible to describe the feelings of Jonathan Wild upon hearing these words pronounced?

He could scarcely have described them himself, though he was conscious that, above all other things, there was the intense desire to wreak his vengeance in some manner upon the man who had made this last suggestion.

If he had known earlier what turn events would have taken, Jonathan would certainly have put it out of his power to make any suggestions at all.

The officer, however, was highly delighted with the notion, for now he made quite sure that if Wild was hiding anywhere there he should be able to capture him.

In a few words, which he took care to speak in a loud tone of voice, he informed his men what he wished them to do.

"Stand close to the edge," he said, "and fire upon the different tufts in succession. Send good volleys at each one, so that if he is there we may make sure of him."

The men were quite as much delighted with this notion as their leader, and would have fired there and then had he not interposed and prevented them.

"Wait a moment," he said, "while I call upon him and give him the chance of surrendering. If he takes no notice of our words, then the consequences will be upon his own head."

Having thus spoken, the officer turned round, and, in a much louder and more commanding voice, he cried:

"Jonathan Wild, we believe you to be secreted somewhere near this place, and we call upon you to come forth and surrender yourself to us. If you refuse, we shall fire successively at the different tufts of reeds until we have riddled them with bullets, so that if you are killed or injured, the consequences will be entirely upon your own head. I will give you two minutes for consideration, and then, if you refuse to surrender, we shall fire!"

The officer took out his watch, and waited two minutes.

During the whole of that time the deepest silence prevailed.

The men all stood with their pistols ready in their grasp, looking quite feverish with expectation.

The time having expired, the officer cried:

"Jonathan Wild, do you surrender? Will you come forth?"

There was no answer.

"You see that tuft of reeds?" the officer cried. "Take that first. Make ready, present, fire!"

Situated as he was, with reeds drawn so closely around his face, Jonathan was quite unable to tell whether the tuft at which they were about to fire was or was not the one in which he was concealed.

But he had made up his mind not to surrender at present, and as soon as the officer told his men to make ready, he gently lowered himself in the water until his head was about two feet below the surface.

The water made a strange singing in his ears, but yet clear above that sound he heard the discharge of the pistols.

The next moment he suffered himself to rise, as he knew that for the time he was safe.

Yet he came up very carefully of course.

Had he made the least splash with the water, or if he had moved the reeds ever so little, the officers would have made such a rigid examination of that part that escape would have been impossible.

He was now very anxious to ascertain whether the tuft in which he was concealed was the one that had been fired at, because, in the event of such being the case, he would be able to remain there safely above water while the remainder of the volleys were fired.

So far as he could tell, however, upon coming to the surface, the reeds around had not been broken or disturbed in the least.

He listened intently for the next words that should fall from the lips of the officer.

Again he heard him cry, "Make ready," and as before he sank down, rising again as soon as the volley was discharged, and remaining for breath above the surface during the time it took the men to reload.

This was repeated very many times, and so skilful was he in his movements, that not only did he escape all injury from the very many bullets that were fired, but positively made no movement that would tend to discover his hiding-place.

A great many shots had been fired without producing the least result, so not unnaturally the officers got rather tired of the sport.

It seemed like positive waste of ammunition, and they began to be apprehensive lest, when the time should come when they would need it, they would run short.

A speech to this effect was made, and then the firing ceased.

The tufts of reeds had been pretty well peppered by the bullets, and the officer said:

"We will fire no more. I believe it will be useless. I thought from the first as soon as he remained silent that we had made a mistake and that he was not hidden there—he could never be mad enough to run such a risk."

"Yet in his obstinacy to do us out of the money," said one, "he may have remained there and suffered himself to be fired at, and for all we know, may be dead."

"That's not very likely," said the officer. "If he's killed it is a chance shot that's slain him. I believe that all this time we've been looking in the wrong place. Come on—let us search around."

The officers withdrew, and Jonathan once more began to breathe with tolerable freedom.

The sound of their footsteps and voices died away upon his ear, and then he began to ask himself the anxious question whether he should seek safety by remaining where he was, or whether he should change his quarters.

After some deliberation he decided upon the former course, and in this he showed his wisdom.

Hours and hours passed, and since they left the edge of the pool Jonathan had heard nothing of his foes.

Yet he was fearful to emerge.

"I will remain till night," was his determination. "When it is dark I shall have such a good chance of getting away, and I positively believe that this water is about the best treatment that my wounds could receive."

In this respect Jonathan Wild was not far wrong.

Except the bullet wound that Jack Sheppard had inflicted upon him, all his other hurts were mere scratches and contusions, though some of these were severe.

Yet water checked the flow of blood and subdued the pain.

He doubted not that by the time night came he should find himself greatly improved.

And so in this hope the long weary hours wore themselves away until darkness came.

He had much difficulty in preventing himself from falling off to sleep, even though in that strange position, and it was only the knowledge that certain death would be the result that kept him awake.

He was absolutely famished as well.

Yet where to satisfy his hunger he had not the least idea.

Nor, indeed, was he able to decide upon the nature of his proceedings.

Where should he go?"

How should he act, supposing that he should escape from the pool in safety?

These were questions that he put to himself over and over again, and yet without being able to form any satisfactory reply.

The officers, he felt tolerably certain, had given up the pursuit of him in that direction in despair, and therefore it was with considerable confidence that he determined to leave the water.

CHAPTER DCCXLV.

JONATHAN WILD CONTINUES HIS STRUGGLES TO ESCAPE FROM THE POLICE OFFICERS.

As soon as ever he attempted to gain the shore, he found an unexpected obstacle in his way.

The long reeds or flags which had afforded him such effectual concealment had in some strange manner twined themselves round and round his body, so that when he attempted to move he found that they held him fast.

At first this gave him only slight uneasiness, for he believed a smart pull was only necessary in order to disengage himself.

He made the effort.

But failed.

This brought another fact to his knowledge—namely, that owing to his immersion in the cold water for so long he had almost lost the use of his limbs.

His weakness was excessive, and the want of food would of course help to produce this result.

Such a discovery as this was alarming in the extreme to make, and a damp, cold perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

Had he reached the end of his mortal career?

Was this, after all, to be his death?

Had he escaped from the police officers only to die a lingering death among the rushes in that pool?

The bare thought was terrible in the extreme, and Jonathan struggled hard again to free himself.

But in vain.

His body and legs were so entangled in the reeds that it seemed almost hopeless to attempt to disengage them.

Above all, he found that he was each moment growing weaker and weaker, so that his chances of liberating himself were even less than they had been at first.

Jonathan floundered about for some time like some huge fish, and then paused from sheer exhaustion.

Some experiment must be tried.

But what?

The first thing was to recover his calmness and coolness, and his strength as well as much as possible.

This was no easy task to do under such circumstances, for the fancy had got hold of him that the clinging reeds were pulling him down lower and lower into the water.

He put out one hand and tried to remove a few of the reeds from round his body.

He could succeed with perfect ease.

But when he let go of them in order to remove others, they returned again to their old position.

Gradually one idea settled into his mind.

He felt confident there was only one means by which he could hope to get free.

That was to put all his strength and energy into one sudden spring, and trust to that to free him.

That effort must be made with the whole of his strength, so he remained patiently waiting some time longer.

"Oh, if I only had brandy or something to warm and revive me," he murmured, "I could then make certain of success."

He had nothing of this kind, however, about his person, and the wish for it was useless.

Perhaps half an hour elapsed before Jonathan made what he determined should be his final effort to get free.

If he failed then, he would give up all hopes of saving his life.

He would resign himself to his fate.

Drawing up his legs, and parting the reeds before him with both arms, he gave one sudden and violent plunge forward.

To his great joy, he found the reeds slowly uncoiling and slipping from him.

Again he made a bound.

Then another and another, and with the exception of a few portions clinging round his feet he was quite free of the dangerous rushes.

He rested for awhile, then freed himself from these and waded to the shore.

The night was a light one, and in the sky the moon was shining brightly.

A more unfavourable night for his escape there could not possibly be.

He looked around him on all sides carefully before he ventured to make another movement.

Then, reassured by the silence and the absence of all moving things, he made a rapid dart across the meadow.

Before he had got half-way to the opposite side, however, his legs failed him.

All his strength seemed suddenly to depart, and he fell down heavily upon the grass.

For some moments he could not even move.

Then he shook the water from his soaked apparel as well as he was able, and crawled away to a little distance further, in order to reach a dry place.

The exertions he had made in the pool in order to gain the land had much enfeebled him, and, moreover, there was in his breast a dreadful feeling arising from hunger.

At that moment he felt as though he could have eaten anything.

So ravenous was he that with his fingers he dug up little roots out of the turf and ate them greedily.

They were cold and moist, and although not affording much nutriment, seemed to appease the pangs of hunger.

Above all other things was the consciousness in his mind that it would be certain death for him to remain where he then was.

No matter how exhausted and feeble he felt, he must struggle on to some better place of shelter.

Creeping forward over the grass almost like a snake, and stopping at every few yards to rest, Jonathan at length succeeded in gaining the hedge.

Through this with much difficulty he made his way.

Then, looking before him, he saw what appeared to be a large plantation or wood.

The trees grew exceedingly close together, and in the moonlight presented a black appearance.

Oh! how eagerly and wistfully did Jonathan Wild fix his eyes upon that spot.

Could he once get beneath the shadow of those trees—could he only crawl to some dark recess, he should then feel himself secure, and be able to lie down and sleep.

Never before had he felt such a heaviness in all his limbs—such an aching of his eyelids.

It seemed beyond his strength to keep them open.

The sight of a place of shelter at such a short distance was enough to nerve him to make another effort, and accordingly, with a slow, painful movement, he dragged himself towards the little wood.

Every painful movement that he made brought him at least a few inches nearer to his destination, and from this reflection he derived ample consolation.

At frequent intervals his heart would beat rapidly with intense dread, for he fancied that in the distance he could hear the sounds made by the approach of his pursuers.

Then with great anger he would find that he had allowed his terrors or his fancies to deceive him, and again he crawled towards the wood.

At last a cry of joy came from his lips.

The shelter of the trees was reached, and he struggled onward with a better spirit.

In between the trees the brushwood grew very thickly—so thickly that it was no easy matter to force a passage through it.

But Jonathan succeeded, and came at length to a small open space almost destitute of vegetation—one of those barren spots that are often found in woods of considerable extent.

Could he but get across this to the dense underwood beyond, all would be well—he would lie down and sleep.

This, indeed, cost him a painful effort, and he would never have succeeded in his purpose but for the knowledge that it would be almost certain death or discovery to remain there.

Yet, could any eye have observed his actions, it would have been perceived that every movement he made was slower and more feeble than the preceding one, until at last, after several vain attempts to creep forward another pace, he fell down at full length, quite insensible, and fell within about a couple of feet of the bushes that fringed the open space.

CHAPTER DCXLVI.

JONATHAN WILD IS DISCOVERED IN THE PLANTATION BY
BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD.

THE intelligence that, after all, Jonathan Wild had managed to effect his escape from the caverns threw quite a damp upon the joy that Jack Sheppard felt in once more meeting with Edgworth Bess.

Blueskin, too, was full of vexation, for the result was in direct opposition to his expectations.

He had firmly believed—and, indeed, who would have thought differently?—that Jonathan Wild, lying at the bottom of that abyss, could not possibly elude his pursuers.

Yet he had done so, and, what was more, he had not left a single trace behind him.

George Wild, however, was quite dead.

The intelligence of his fate was forwarded to the proper authorities, and the chase resumed after Jonathan.

"You see, Jack," said Blueskin, "it is in vain for us to leave this task to the accomplishment of police officers—they could not be nearer to success than they have been, and yet, you see, he has slipped through their fingers."

"It is so," said Jack. "We must join in the pursuit again."

"You are right—that's my determination."

"Not only shall we be doing our duty to ourselves, but to many others, by hunting him down. Come—I am ready to start at once."

"And so am I; but yet we must have a little thought respecting our proceedings. The police officers, I know, look upon me not only with some suspicion, but with jealousy as well."

"No doubt—no doubt."

"But we must be very careful, Jack, for it would be discouraging in the extreme if either of us got into trouble on Jonathan's account."

"It would."

"Well, then, what we do must be done independently and without the knowledge of the officers."

"I am quite willing that such should be the course adopted," said Jack.

This being agreed to, all discussion of their future plans was left in abeyance, and, having obtained their horses, they once more commenced their pursuit of their old enemy.

There was one great disadvantage that they laboured under, which was, they had no idea of the direction Jonathan Wild had taken.

They could do no more than trust to chance to lead them right.

While hastening forward, Blueskin suddenly heard a shout, and he at once pulled up.

Afterwards he wished he had not done so, for it seemed that the cry came from the lips of the chief officer.

"Mr.—a—a—excuse me, but I have not the pleasure of knowing your name," he said.

"Nor is it important that you should—I have many reasons for keeping that to myself. Why did you call me? I am on urgent business."

"Well, sir," said the officer, with great respect, "I judged from your manner that you were riding off towards London. Of course you have heard of our failure, and no one is more vexed than myself. I merely wished to request you not to throw any more blame upon me than you are obliged, especially as I have received certain information of his whereabouts, and am now about to get my men together and proceed to the spot at once."

"You may depend upon me," said Blueskin, "for, after all, you were no more to blame than I was. Without a rope ladder, it was impossible to descend into that pit."

"It was—it was, and I am rejoiced to find that you take so reasonable a view of the transaction."

"Oh, don't mention it; but, in order that your statement may appear to be true, tell me whereabouts it is that you expect to find Jonathan, and what is the information you have received."

The officer then proceeded to relate some facts with which the reader is already acquainted.

He stated how the officer in command of another body of police had seen Jonathan, chased him for some distance, and finally lost sight of him.

"You see, sir," added the officer, "they didn't know, as we do, in what an exhausted condition he must be. We know that he is quite incapable of making any resistance or getting very far. He was much to blame for giving up so easily. However, it will be all for the best, since the credit of capturing him will belong to me."

"I hope so," said Blueskin, who then made particular inquiries as to the exact spot where Jonathan had been seen.

This was readily given, and again he rode off.

During his brief conversation, Jack Sheppard had continued to ride on.

He by no means wished to come face to face with the officer, even although the night was drawing on and it was already dusk.

He kept his horse only at a walking pace, however, so that Blueskin, when he started, rapidly overtook him.

They continued on the road to London for some little distance, and while doing so, Blueskin acquainted Jack with the facts that had just come to his knowledge.

They then turned off towards Sedgfield.

"There's something like a presentiment in my breast," said Jack, "that before very long we shall succeed in our efforts. Come on—spur your horse hard, for I am all impatience to reach the place you have described."

At the rattling pace they went, this took but a short time.

The roadside was examined, the field searched, and at last the pool was found.

This place had been so well described that it was not possible to mistake it.

Its edge was quickly searched, although they knew the officers had performed this duty themselves.

"Look!" said Jack. "What's that?"

He pointed, as he spoke, to a green-looking mass outside of the pool.

They hastened towards it, and found it to consist of a few long, green, slimy reeds.

They were some that Jonathan Wild had disengaged himself from when just at the edge of the water.

"This looks strange," said Blueskin. "Surely he could not have been hiding here while the officers were firing."

"It seems impossible," said Jack. "But do you perceive how wet the grass is here? And if you will notice, there are marks of footsteps, too."

"Well, then, let us assume that he did hide in this pool, and that he has left it. Let us look around us for the place where he would be most likely to conceal himself. Depend upon it, he would not have the strength to get very far."

They looked around them while they spoke, and the first object upon which their eyes rested was the little wood.

"That's the place," said Jack, "and if he has only managed to gain its shelter, we shall have a very difficult job indeed to unearth him."

The edge of the wood was very quickly reached, and they arrived at it only a very short time after Jonathan had entered.

There was nothing they could see, however, that would serve them as any clue to the route he had taken.

"There's only one thing we can do," said Blueskin, "and that is, to draw our swords and tramp resolutely everywhere about among this brushwood. It may take a long time, but we shall be rewarded in the end, for I feel certain he is here."

"So do I."

"Well, then, let us commence, and we may succeed even quicker than we anticipate."

Dismounting from their steeds and drawing their swords, Blueskin and Jack at once commenced a very active search.

They continued for a couple of hours, and then paused to rest.

Up to that moment they had found nothing.

While resting on the trunk of a fallen tree, looking carefully all around them, Jack perceived something fluttering upon a branch of a prickly shrub.

Without a word, he hastened off towards it, and, taking hold of the fragment, examined it more attentively.

Curiosity made Blueskin rise and follow him.

"Look here," said Jack—"this shows we are on the



[THE DISCOVERY OF JONATHAN WILD.]

right track. If this is not a portion of his coat, I am much mistaken."

Blueskin examined the piece of cloth as well, and then exclaimed:

"Yes, yes—I feel almost sure of it. Forward, Jack—we shall find him yet!"

They plunged forward through the bushes, and in a few moments afterwards emerged into that open, barren spot we have already mentioned.

Ere they had gone many paces, both uttered a simultaneous shout.

They stopped instantly.

Before them, lying down at full length on the ground, and with the moonbeams falling brightly upon him, was the form of Jonathan Wild.

So surprised were they at this sudden discovery, and at his motionless attitude, that for a minute or two they neither moved nor spoke.

No. 157.—BLUESKIN.

It was then Jack who said, in a faint whisper: "Is he dead?"

"I think not," said Blueskin; "yet how still he is lying there!"

He crept forward cautiously while he spoke, and, going round to one side, managed to obtain a view of Jonathan's face.

It was so bruised and scratched that it was almost unrecognisable.

Yet one glance showed them that he was not dead, but only sleeping.

"He's worn out—exhausted by his efforts," said Jack; "and who could wonder at it? Now, then, how are we to proceed?"

"That's a difficult question, Jack, and we must take some time to consider it. For my own part, I scarcely know what to say."

"Nor I. It is quite certain, however, that we must

have no hand in his capture; if we do, we must come forward to give an account of our proceedings, and then that will be fatal to us."

"It will. It seems to me that there is only one course left open to us."

"And what may that be?"

"For us both to remain here and watch over him. We will not remove our eyes from him for a single moment, and when he awakes we will contrive to keep him continually in sight."

"That might easily be done," said Blueskin; "and, what's more, I believe it will not be long before the officers make their appearance here. The one who spoke to us is anxious in the extreme to redeem his credit by making a capture, and therefore he will not rest until he has searched this plantation thoroughly from end to end."

"And if he is quick," said Jack, "he will arrive before Jonathan recovers from his slumbers. Suppose we climb up into that tree, and wait there; we shall then be able to command a good view around, and be in no danger of discovery ourselves."

"I don't think we can do better," said Blueskin, "and the sooner the officers come the better."

CHAPTER DCCXLVII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS MAKE THEIR APPEARANCE IN THE PLANTATION.

For some time Jonathan slumbered heavily.

But at last he began to show symptoms of great restlessness and uneasiness.

Those frightful dreams that always visited him whenever he closed his eyes, and which made sleep a curse and a dread to him, again began to torment him.

He writhed and fought about as though in deadly conflict with some powerful foe, and cries and shouts came from his lips.

Yet in his wildest dreams it is questionable whether Jonathan Wild thought of anything that was worse than reality.

Little did he think that all his movements were being watched by Blueskin, and, above all others, by Jack Sheppard.

The latter he fondly and truly believed had long since met with the fate that he had designed for him.

His cries and shouts at length became unendurable, and Jack Sheppard said:

"I can't remain here and listen to such awful sounds. Let me descend—I will wake him."

"No, no—think of nothing of the kind. Let him be where he is."

"I can't."

In a moment Jack Sheppard swung himself lightly from the tree.

Even as his feet touched the ground, Jonathan Wild awoke.

His eyes were glaring fearfully, and the cold perspiration of intense fear was on his forehead.

He started to his feet with a wild, shrieking cry, and then all at once he stopped, and stood as though changed to stone.

Was he dreaming still? or did he see before him an apparition?

He glanced around.

On all sides he could see the trees and other objects.

He looked up at the sky, and saw the moon and the stars.

No, he was not dreaming, and it was in truth an apparition that stood before him.

He retreated a step, and then, in a wild, shrieking voice, he spoke.

"Off—off!" he said. "Begone—begone! Do not torment me any further, or you will drive me completely mad! I know you now, Jack Sheppard—I know why you have come! This is the second time that I have seen your form! My end is drawing near. I feel it—I know it! Mercy! Leave me—leave me! Do not approach me! Begone, I say!"

To tell the honest truth, Jack Sheppard was quite as much startled as even Jonathan Wild was himself.

At the first moment he could not understand the meaning of his conduct.

Then all at once it flashed into his mind that Jonathan

was labouring under the impression that what he saw before him was an apparition.

It was easy enough for him to fall into such a delusion as this, and Jack stepped forward with the intention of disabusing him of it.

That onward movement was, however, to Jonathan Wild fraught with a thousand terrors.

By a fearful effort he broke the spell that chained him to the spot on which he stood, and, with wild, awful shrieks thrilling from his lips, he dashed headlong through the trees, forgetting, in his excitement and insane fear, all about his previous fatigue.

Nor did he look either to the right or to the left, or attempt to avoid the various obstacles that were in his path.

He plunged blindly, madly on.

The thorns tore his flesh and his apparel, and he stumbled once or twice over some impediment in his path.

Then, with full force, he rushed against a thick, low-lying branch of a tree that shot out horizontally from the trunk.

It was just such a height from the ground that it caught him full upon the forehead.

There was a sickening, crashing sound, and he fell backwards as if shot.

In the meanwhile, Blueskin had descended from the tree, and followed in the footsteps of his companion.

He was just in time to see Jonathan fall to the ground like a stunned ox.

Before he had time to make any remark upon the subject, loud cries and shouts came upon his ears, mingled with the trampling of many feet.

"The officers!" he cried. "They have heard Jonathan's shrieks, and are hastening in this direction! In a few minutes at the most they will find him."

"But they must not find us," said Jack.

"No—no, not by any means! Quick—up this tree, and the chances are a thousand to one against our being found!"

The tree closest to them afforded every facility for climbing, and in much less time than would have been considered possible, Blueskin and Jack were safely ensconced among its topmost branches.

Yet the position they had taken up was such a one as to enable them to command a view of all that was going on below, and they waited in no slight suspense to see what would happen next.

The trampling among the bushes grew more and more distinct.

The officers were making their way to the right spot with tolerable certainty.

Jonathan, insensible to all that was going on around him, knew nothing of this fresh danger, and, judging by appearances, it was pretty certain that he would fall an easy prey into the hands of his enemies.

At last, after giving them so much trouble, they would be able to put out their hands and seize him.

First of all, however, we must refer for a moment or two to the proceedings of the officers who were approaching.

After having accosted Blueskin in the manner we have already described, the chief officer, with all convenient speed, got his men together, and rode off to the place that had been described.

They arrived shortly after Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

Unlike our friends, however, they took the word of their companions that the pool and all around it had been searched thoroughly.

"You looked in the wrong place," said the chief officer, as he raised himself in the stirrups and looked around. "While you were searching there he was hiding in some other place."

"But where—where?"

"Well, that's the question, I know. But can you see that plantation yonder?"

"Yes, I see it now, though I didn't notice it before."

"Well, then, rely upon it that's the place where Jonathan Wild has chosen to conceal himself. I feel quite certain that if he had strength to crawl so far as there, he would not be able to go a step further, so that, in all probability, he will be there still. At any rate, we will search it thoroughly, and not give up until we have tramped over every square yard of it."

Judging by looking around, it had indeed some pro-

bability that the plantation would be chosen by Jonathan Wild as a hiding-place.

With the exception of that one mass of trees, the remainder of the country, as far as the eye could reach, was uniformly composed of meadow land, so that concealment anywhere upon it was quite out of the question.

The officers accordingly, without going near the pool, rode straight to the plantation, where they dismounted, and left one of their number in charge of the horses.

Then, plunging at once among the trees, they commenced their search.

Before they had gone far, however, those loud cries to which Jonathan had given utterance reached their ears.

The cries came from a distance they could tell, for they were faint.

Yet there was no mistaking their character, nor the direction from which they came.

"Haste—haste!" said the chief officer. "We have found him at last! Ten to one some one is attempting to take him prisoner, and a furious struggle is the consequence! Quick—quick, and we shall be there in time!"

The chief officer himself set the example of rushing forward at full speed through the trees, and, guided only by the sound, they hastened towards the spot where Jonathan Wild was.

But all at once the sounds that they had heard came to a termination.

But, being able to fix upon their source with tolerable certainty, they hastened forward, labouring under the greatest possible excitement.

CHAPTER DCCXLVIII.

JONATHAN WILD IS CAPTURED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS, AND CARRIED TO LONDON IN A CART.

THE chief police officer still kept the lead.

But all at once he stopped and uttered a loud shout.

The effect of this was to bring his men very quickly around him.

Then they all saw, lying down in that strange attitude where he had fallen, the man they so wished to overtake, and whose capture had given them so much trouble.

With another cry, this time of exultation, the chief officer seized hold of him.

He was the first to place his hands upon his prisoner.

"He has met with an ugly blow," he said, gazing at his face, down which the blood was trickling. "He is quite insensible, so now, my lads, get some rope and bind him securely. Then, when he comes to himself, he won't have a chance of doing any mischief."

This command was readily obeyed; and while his men were binding Jonathan Wild securely with ropes and placing handcuffs upon his wrists, the chief officer began to wonder what was the meaning of the strange condition in which he found his prisoner.

Why were those cries uttered? and by whom had that blow been dealt that had produced his insensibility?

These were unanswerable questions, and he looked all around him without being able to see anything at all unusual.

He was interrupted in his ruminations by the intelligence that Jonathan Wild was fast bound.

He dismissed his thoughts at once.

Jonathan Wild was his prisoner, and it did not matter for anything else.

"Now, then," he cried, "we will get him to London in the shortest possible space of time. We cannot be too speedy in our movements."

"But how is it to be done?"

This question was a puzzler, for Jonathan's condition looked to be very serious indeed.

The officers were most solicitous indeed to preserve his life.

They knew that they would not gain so much credit by taking his body to Newgate, and, moreover, they would be deprived of the money that would be paid upon his execution, and which was always known to them as blood money.

"If we could only get a cart," said one, "and a good

horse in it—that would be the best way of taking him. The remainder could then form a guard round it, so that there could be no possibility of an escape."

"An escape?" ejaculated the chief police officer. "No, he shall never escape from me—I will take good care of that, for until I see him safe inside Newgate and get my receipt, I will never remove my eyes from him, no matter what there is to be seen."

From the resolute manner in which the chief officer spoke, there could be no question but that he fully intended to keep his word.

"I agree to the cart," he said. "Go, some of you, and obtain one. If you can't get one nearer, go to Sedgfield—you will be sure to get one there. In the meanwhile we will follow on in the best way we can."

This being agreed to, one of the men immediately started off to fetch the cart.

Under the direction of their chief, the others employed themselves in making a rude bier of the various branches of trees that were around; and having succeeded in doing this, they placed the still insensible body of Jonathan Wild upon it.

At a necessarily slow pace they then retraced their steps, and made their way out of the plantation.

The officer in command kept his word literally, for although he did not actually assist in carrying the rude bier, yet he walked by the side of it, with his hand on his prisoner's arm and with his eyes fixed upon his face.

How long Jonathan's insensibility might continue they knew not, but from the manner in which they looked upon him it was rather evident that they dreaded this event, although he was now in such a maimed and mangled condition.

Blueskin and Jack watched the little procession until they could see it no longer.

Then, waiting a short time, they as silently as possible descended the tree, and guided by the rustling of the branches before them, they made their way out of the plantation.

The officers changed frequently in carrying the bier for Jonathan was no light weight.

When the outskirts of the plantation were reached there was a general pause.

"We will carry him as far as the road," said the chief officer, "and rely upon it by the time we have done that we shall hear the cart coming along the road."

After a brief rest they again set forward.

The plantation was only separated from the road by a couple of fields, but these fields were of very large extent, and therefore some time was necessarily consumed in crossing them.

As soon as the officers had left the cover of the wood, Blueskin and Jack paused at the edge and watched them.

"It will be some time, perhaps, before the cart arrives," said Jack. "In the meanwhile, let us regain possession of our horses; we shall then be prepared for any emergency."

"Good. They are somewhere close at hand."

The horses were easily found and captured, and then, leading them by the bridle, the two friends again advanced to the border of the plantation.

By the time they reached it they saw that the police officers had gained the high-road, and were waiting there for the cart to approach.

"Now, Blueskin," said Jack, "in spite of all the risk and danger—no matter how great—I am determined to follow that procession to London. I will see Jonathan carried into Newgate."

"And so will I," said Blueskin. "I care nothing for danger now. I will be close at hand, and take care, if he escapes the officers, he does not escape me."

"He doesn't seem in a very good way for making his escape," said Jack. "I believe they have him secure this time; they ought to have, he fell into their clutches easily enough."

"If it comes to that, it's you who ought to claim the reward."

Just at that moment they heard the rattling of the cart as it came along the high-road from Sedgfield.

It was drawn by one of the best and fastest horses that could be procured.

Not without some difficulty, Jonathan's body was lifted up by the officers and placed in it.

The chief and three more got into the cart, so that the strictest watch could be kept.

One of them, of course, held the reins.

The other officers clustered round the cart in a dense throng, and then, considering all things, the procession moved on at a smart pace towards London.

When they were far enough in advance, Blueskin and Jack quitted their place of concealment.

"Come," said the latter, "we may venture, I think, to keep pretty close to them; their eyes and all their faculties will be bent upon their prisoner, and they will not be at all likely to pay any attention to our approach."

This was exceedingly likely.

"It will be best to keep tolerably close," said Blueskin. "If the distance to London was only trifling it would not so much matter; but they will be compelled to pause once or twice at least, upon the road, and those are the times when the greatest vigilance must be made use of."

"Yes, when he recovers his senses, and realises his position, Jonathan will know that those halts will give him the best chance, and you may rely upon it, he will not hesitate to avail himself of them to the utmost."

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard gained the high-road, and, although their progress was swift and the clatter of their horses' feet considerable, yet the police officers in advance never once troubled themselves so far as to turn their heads round and look to see who it was on the high-road behind them.

CHAPTER DCCXLIX.

JONATHAN WILD AWAKES TO A KNOWLEDGE OF HIS TRUE POSITION, AND IS FILLED WITH DESPAIR.

The chief officer was anxious to push on as far as he could without coming to a halt.

Like Blueskin, he had great dread of this event, for, helpless and overcomer as the prisoner appeared to be, yet he could not blind himself to the knowledge that he would have a much better chance of making his escape than that he would while they were in motion.

The only thing they could do, however, was to keep a good watch upon him whether in motion or not.

He determined that there should be no stopping to sleep during the whole of the journey, although it might probably occupy twelve hours or more, even supposing that they were tolerably lucky in procuring relays of horses.

At the first roadside inn they came to, the inquiry was at once made for fresh horses, and it so happened that they could be accommodated with them.

A very brief delay took place, for a fresh horse was quickly placed in the shafts of the cart, and each officer removed the trappings of the steed he had been riding.

The cessation of movement, however, restored Jonathan Wild to consciousness, and, in a dreamy, confused fashion, he opened one eye, and looked about him.

The other was quite swelled up and closed, in consequence of the violent blow he had received from the branch of the tree.

His intellects were wandering, and some moments elapsed before he comprehended his position.

The knowledge first came upon him when he attempted to move his hands, and raise himself so as to look around.

He discovered that they were tied securely, and that his feet were tied as well.

Handcuffs, too, were on his wrists.

Then a dismal, horrible yell broke from his lips, and, as it came upon the ears of the officers with great suddenness, they were all startled.

The yell was followed by a succession of those awful imprecations for which Jonathan Wild was so famous.

He called down every possible curse he could upon the heads of his captors.

Although he was tied so tightly, he rolled himself over in the cart, and dashed about in quite a furious manner; and so great was his passion that foam actually gathered upon his lips.

"Come—come, Mr. Wild," said the chief officer, "it is not worth while for you to knock yourself about in this manner. The worst's over, so you had better put up with it."

Jonathan favoured him with another string of curses, but made no other reply.

"Very well," said the chief officer, "do just as you like; I don't want to control your actions in the least, only I can just tell you you are not going the right way to work with us, if you wish to have things made as smooth and pleasant as possible."

Again Jonathan raved and cursed, and endeavoured to fling himself over the side of the cart.

This was impossible, and, at a signal from their leader, two police officers jumped in, and, placing themselves at each side of the prisoner, held him down in such a manner as to prevent him from moving a limb.

By this time they were all in readiness to start, and so the signal to go forward was given.

Jonathan Wild soon made the discovery that he had stern and earnest men to deal with, and therefore he abruptly ceased his insane behaviour.

It was wonderful to see how suddenly he changed from the highest pitch of madness to complete calmness.

"Look out!" said the chief officer, who occupied his old position by the side of the cart—"look out!—he means something; be on your guard!"

Jonathan ground his teeth together with an audible sound.

But, as he lay in the cart, with his brain whirling round and round, he endeavoured, by closing his eyes, to regain command over his mind.

Some time elapsed before he succeeded.

Then he endeavoured to realise his exact position.

That brought back to his recollection something that he had already forgotten.

The cold perspiration started out all over him, and he shivered from head to foot, like one in an ague.

His cheeks grew white with terror, and he was unable to keep his eyes closed any longer.

He glared apprehensively around him.

He remembered all at once that he had been confronted by what he felt certain was the spectre of Jack Sheppard.

Twice he had seen it, and such an appearance could bode no good to him.

Perhaps before his last moment came he would see him again.

It was a great relief to Jonathan to roll his eyes around and note, one by one, the various countenances of his captors.

The form he so much dreaded was not among them.

Then he knew that he was on his way to Newgate.

How close he might be to that huge prison he was unable to form any idea, and as for asking his captors the distance, that was ridiculous.

For aught he knew, London might be close at hand.

Surely, finding himself in such a desperate position as this, one would think that all hopes of escape would fade completely from his mind.

But such was not the case.

Bruised and mangled as he was in body, and enfeebled and terrified in spirit as he was, yet Jonathan clung to life.

His brain seemed to ache and throb, and yet he endeavoured to elaborate some cunning stratagem by which he might release himself from the custody of the police officers.

He might have known that, even had he succeeded in his attempt, his success would have been but of short duration.

In his present condition, he could not possibly fly far.

He would be overtaken and recaptured easily.

Yet for all that, he kept pondering over his position.

He knew that if he did not effect his escape while riding along his death would be certain.

Once in the prison of Newgate, he felt certain that no efforts of his, however strong or well-directed, would enable him to force his way out.

His stay there would be short, and he would only be allowed to come forth in order to be led to execution.

Already, in imagination, he could see the scaffold at Tyburn rising up before him, and he turned half sick at the prospect.

Although he lay so still, the officers on the other side of him did not relax their vigilance in the least.

It is true, they did not hold him so tightly as they did when they were compelled to keep him down; but they only shifted their grasp in such a manner that they could tighten it instantly, should occasion arise.

At the next halting-place they were not so fortunate as at the first.

No fresh horses could be obtained, and those they rode were already so knocked up that a rest of a couple of hours at the least was imperative.

Thus, then, what the chief officer so justly dreaded came to pass at last.

After some consultation, it was agreed that Jonathan Wild should not be removed from the cart.

The shafts were propped up, and the horse taken out.

The two officers remained by his side, and the one in command still retained his old position.

Jonathan was thus very closely guarded.

None of the officers were permitted to enter the inn; but they all had some refreshment brought out to them.

Jonathan watched them hungrily for some time, wondering whether they would offer anything to him.

Finding they did not, the pangs of hunger compelled him to speak.

"Do you intend to starve me?" he said, hoarsely and huskily. "I have not tasted food or water for more hours than I can remember! I ask you again, do you intend to starve me?"

"Not by any means," said the chief officer; "but you must control your appetite until I get you safe inside Newgate. I wish you were there with all my heart. When once you are there, secure in your cell, you may make as good a meal as you please."

Jonathan ground his teeth again.

"Are you so inhuman—so savage as to refuse me even a drop of anything to drink? Is not that exceeding your duty? Would you have me die on the road? No, no—I am sure you would not; you would lose your blood money then!"

"I don't mind giving you something to drink, Mr. Wild," said the chief officer. "I am sorry to see you in your present condition; yet, you have only yourself to blame for it. Why did you not give in at first?"

Jonathan was silent.

"If you promise to be calm and quiet, I will attend to your requests; if you are violent, the consequences will only recoil upon yourself; as on another occasion, I should turn a deaf ear to you appeals."

Jonathan still remained silent.

By the officer's direction, a huge jug of water was brought and held to the prisoner's lips.

He gazed with dissatisfaction when he saw what the liquid was.

But he was so parched and burning with thirst that he was glad of even water, and so he drank eagerly.

"There," said the chief officer, "that's all I can do for you. You must wait till we get to Newgate; luckily, that will not be long first."

Without a word, Jonathan sank back into his old position, nor did he move again.

The two hours expired.

The horses were brought forth, and again their journey was resumed.

Still Jonathan Wild lay at the bottom of the cart, looking more like a dead body than a living man.

The fact was, he had fallen into a kind of swoon or stupor that was produced by a variety of causes, among which may be mentioned want of food and rest, loss of blood, and the many terrible adventures through which he had lately passed.

All these conspired to deprive him of his energy.

CHAPTER DCCL.

NEWGATE IS AT LAST REACHED, AND JONATHAN WILD IS CONFINED SECURELY IN ONE OF THE STRONGEST CELLS.

In this state of semi-stupefaction Jonathan Wild continued during the remainder of the journey.

He knew perfectly well where he was—knew that he was drawing nearer and nearer to his doom.

And yet he found himself without the power to raise even so much as his finger to prevent it.

All the time, however, the officers, fearing some treachery, kept a wary eye upon him.

With good reason they distrusted this seeming quietude.

They did not believe their prisoner to be so bad as he really was.

His eyes remained fast closed, and he never uttered a single word during the remainder of the time.

At last, to the infinite satisfaction of the chief officer and all his subordinates, London was reached.

It was early morning when they arrived, and but few people were visible in the streets.

Therefore they were able to make their way with good speed to their destination.

Those few pedestrians who, by chance or necessity, were abroad so early in the morning cast curious and inquiring eyes upon the strange-looking procession as it made its way along at such a rapid rate.

Some, even guessing its destination, started to run, and the majority of these followed the cart until it halted before the little door at Newgate.

The stoppage of the cart seemed on this occasion to act upon Jonathan something like an electric shock.

Before his captors could prevent him, he started up suddenly into a sitting posture.

He saw then where he was.

He knew that in another minute at the most he should be beneath the roof of the gloomy building, and that after that there would be no hope for him whatever.

This knowledge made him furious, and without thinking of the consequences, he commenced an insane struggle with the officers.

Although they were strong men, and two to one, and in full possession of all their physical powers, while he was bound, yet, incredible as it may seem, he managed to fling himself over the side of the cart.

He fell down heavily upon the paving stones, and lay there without power to move again.

"Quick—seize him," cried the chief officer—"seize him, all of you, and carry him in!"

In the meanwhile a tremendous summons for admission had been given at the door.

It awoke the man on the lock, who, peering through the iron bars, was filled with wonder at the sight he saw before him.

With trembling haste, he thrust the key into the lock, and flung the door wide open, while, at the same time, he pulled a knob that communicated with a bell in the Governor's private apartment in the prison.

This was a little arrangement that had been made by Mr. Noakes's successor, a man, be it said, well suited for the office which he held, and one not at all likely to abuse it.

His regulations had been very strict, and he had given particular instructions that, whenever anything of an unusual character occurred, the man on the lock was instantly to apprise him of it by ringing the bell.

Still struggling slightly, Jonathan Wild was carried up the steep flight of stone steps into the vestibule.

Then he was laid upon the ground.

The door was secured the moment the last officer had entered.

"The Governor will be here in a moment," said the man on the lock; "I have already summoned him."

Even as he spoke the words, the door was flung open and the new Governor appeared.

"What is it?" he asked, in sharp, quick tones of authority—"what has happened?"

"I have brought you a celebrated prisoner, Mr. Kendrick," said the chief officer—"one that we have been trying hard to catch, and one that we have at last!"

"Do you mean Jonathan Wild?"

"No other. Advance—here he is!"

With great curiosity, the new Governor approached.

He was exceedingly anxious to have a good look at the ex-thief-taker.

But when he saw what a terrible condition he was in—so bruised, and cut, and mangled—he averted his eyes in horror.

"Now, Mr. Kendrick, if you will write out a receipt

and give it me I will be off at once, for I can tell you that I am heartily tired of my job. My share of the work is done so far; but I would not advise you to permit him to escape from your custody; if you do——"

"You have no need to caution me," said the Governor, rather coolly—"he will not escape. I would answer for his safe custody with my life!"

"Well, that's all right. I have done with him now, and my responsibility is at an end. Give me the receipt—that's all that I require."

The receipt was duly written out and handed to him, and the chief officer and the rest took their departure from the prison.

The turnkeys were then summoned, and Jonathan Wild was picked up just as he was, and carried along the gloomy corridors to the strongest cell in all the prison.

Then the cords were removed, and a heavy set of irons riveted upon the prisoner—the heaviest that had been made, and, if tradition speaks truly, the very same set of fetters that are now hung up over the doors of the present building of Newgate, but which are fast rusting away from exposure to the weather.

To the band of iron that went round his waist was attached a chain of massive links, which was secured to a staple embedded deeply in the mortar between the blocks of stone.

The handcuffs were then removed and the cord taken off.

Jonathan was secure enough now.

The Governor was determined that Jonathan Wild should have no chance of escape.

He singled out four men, and ordered them to share the cell with the prisoner, and to watch his every movement closely.

He told them they would be relieved from their duty every two hours.

Although he was such a notorious villain, and quite unworthy of any kind treatment whatever, attempts were made to improve the prisoner's condition and make him more comfortable.

Warm food was also brought to him.

But his strength was already so frightfully reduced that he could scarcely raise it to his lips.

The mass of iron upon him literally weighed him down.

He was in a sitting position, and, if his life had depended upon it, he could not at that time have raised himself upright.

The effect of the soup that had been given him was soon perceptible, and as he grew stronger so did his rage return.

Again he broke forth into the most horrible curses and ravings, levelling his imprecations at all persons and all objects.

The men in the cell, accustomed as they were to seeing the worst side of humanity, looked at one another in speechless dread, and wondered how it was the building did not fall and crush such a blasphemous wretch beneath it.

Glad indeed were they when, at the expiration of two hours, four other men were sent, who took their places.

Jonathan, perceiving the change, again broke out into his curses.

"Let him be for awhile," said one; "he will soon grow tired of that sort of thing. He knows he is safe now; nothing can save him."

In the meanwhile the Governor, with all speed, sent off a messenger to the Secretary of State, informing him of the important capture that had been made, and requesting that immediate attention should be given to it.

In less than a couple of hours afterwards a proper order for Jonathan Wild's execution was forwarded.

He was appointed to die at Tyburn at mid-day on the Monday following.

Of course, having been already tried and condemned, there was no necessity for any fresh trial, nor, indeed, for a fresh warrant; it was merely endorsed according to the usual form.

Having received this document, the Governor at once proceeded to the cell of the prisoner.

He read it to him, made him acquainted with its particulars, and bade him prepare himself for that death which would so soon overtake him.

But Jonathan's only reply was horrible cursings, and

the Governor, aghast and disgusted, backed out of the cell, determined to visit him no more.

Faithful to the intention they had expressed, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard followed the course of the procession.

During most of the time they kept it in sight, halting when they halted, and accommodating their speed to those before them.

Upon nearing London, they grew somewhat anxious on their own account, and muffled themselves up as closely as they could in their riding-cloaks.

It required no trifling amount of courage to approach so near to the building of Newgate as they did.

Yet they would not have felt content had they not done so.

From a distance, they watched the stoppage of the cart.

They saw the struggle that took place, and beheld Jonathan hurl himself over the side.

They were prepared then to take part in the chase, should he succeed in getting away.

But they soon saw that the officers were upon him almost immediately.

And then he was carried into the building.

When the ponderous gates were closed there was a moment's silence, and then Jack said:

"That, then, at last, is over."

"Yes," said Blueskin, solemnly, "he is there, and good care will be taken of him—he will never come forth except to his death."

"We have that to witness," said Jack Sheppard, gloomily. "I shall care not. The aim of my existence will have been achieved, and after that, it matters little what becomes of me."

CHAPTER DCCLI.

JONATHAN WILD MAKES AN INEFFECTUAL ATTEMPT TO BRIBE HIS JAILERS.

AFTER the Governor had left the cell a gloomy stupor seemed to enthrall the senses of Jonathan Wild.

All that violence of manner which he had displayed suddenly disappeared, and, placing his elbows on his knees, he buried his face in his hands.

Who shall say what awful thoughts were then passing through his mind?

There was the consciousness upon him that the end of his career had been reached—nothing now remained for him but death—the grim phantom we have all to to meet.

But to Jonathan its aspect was terrific—death upon the scaffold was to him fraught with ten thousand horrors.

And, worst of all, there was no escape from it.

He could not flatter himself that circumstances would arise that would enable him to avoid his fate.

The precautions that had been taken by the Governor placed such a thing out of the question.

Those four men sitting there so silently, and watching him so intently, would never allow him the least opportunity.

Once, for a moment—and only for a moment—he thought some good might be done by bribing them.

No one knew better than himself that all the Newgate officials were by no means averse to having their palms tickled.

And had not Jonathan the means of bribing them to a very heavy amount?

There was the large amount of gold that had been buried in a spot that he could readily describe.

Would not that large sum tempt them?

It would almost seem so; but then his ruminations were interrupted by the opening of the cell door, and four more men entered, who relieved the others of their duty.

This continual change of guard gave him, then, no chance; before he would have time to make any impression, those men to whom he had been addressing himself would be replaced by others.

A gloomy despair then slowly settled round his heart, excluding even the faintest glimmer of a ray of hope.

He was there—fast confined in Newgate—and there he would have to remain until the sheriffs paid him their last visit.

And, after all, he began to ask himself why should he

desire to live? What charms had existence now for him that he should wish to cling to it?

He was forced to answer: None.

But though he might be ready and willing to face death, he should wish to do so in any other way than at Tyburn.

Again he began to think.

If he could not hope to succeed in bribing the jailers to allow him to escape from Newgate, was there not just a chance that he should be able to persuade them to supply him with some drug that would enable him to cheat the hangman?

Yes, surely that was feasible—at any rate, nothing could be lost by trying the experiment.

He looked up, and found that the men were all engaged in watching him attentively.

"Is there any water to be had?" he asked.

One of the men, by way of reply, pointed to a stone pitcher near Jonathan's feet.

He raised it to his lips with an assumption of thankfulness; then, having drank a little, restored it to its place.

He made a wry face.

"That's poor stuff!" he ejaculated.

By his manner, it was evident that he expected this remark would call forth some observation or other.

But he was disappointed.

None came.

The old hateful look began to shine in his eyes.

"Gold," he said, huskily—"gold! There is much gold to be earned if you are inclined."

They shook their heads.

"I tell you there is!"

Still silence.

"Are you dumb?" the prisoner asked, with difficulty keeping down his anger.

"To you we are," answered one. "Our express instructions are to hold no conversation with you whatever, so do not trouble us any further."

Wild ground his teeth.

"I—I have a favour to ask—you shall have gold in return for it. When it comes to your turn to guard me again bring with you a sufficient quantity of laudanum, or any other poison, to take away my life; in return for it, I will tell you where you can dig up such a sum of money as will make all four of you rich men for life."

Again they shook their heads.

But Jonathan was not to be daunted so easily.

He had now a definite purpose before him, and his disposition made him strain every nerve to accomplish it.

By turns, he promised, threatened, appealed to them to grant his request.

But all in vain.

The men were firm—so firm, and so persistently silent that, after a time, Jonathan gave up the attempt in despair, and relapsed into his former despondent attitude.

And so he remained during the remainder of the day—certainly the longest day that he had passed for many months.

He felt almost grateful when he found the shades of evening creeping into the cell, and by degrees hiding his warders from his view.

Rough, coarse food was beside him, together with a small quantity of unwholesome water.

But neither of these he touched.

Just when it was positively dark in the cell, there was the sound of footsteps without and the door was opened.

Then there entered four more men to take the place of those who had watched their allotted time.

And along with them came the ordinary of Newgate.

In the bend of his arm, he carried a small black book, and he advanced with a slow step towards the prisoner.

He addressed to him some words of ordinary consolation.

Jonathan raised his head quickly, and glared furiously upon him.

"Begone," he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice—"begone! I want you not! Leave me to myself!"

The chaplain endeavoured to remain, in the hope of bringing the prisoner to some idea of his terrible position.

But Jonathan became so violent and excited that he

was compelled to give up the attempt as a hopeless one.

He withdrew, determined to renew his effort on the following day.

Could anyone have seen Jonathan Wild twenty-four hours ago, and gazed upon him now, they would scarcely have been able to believe that so great a change could take place in anyone in so short a period.

Life appeared gradually to be leaving him.

The reaction of all the horrible excitement he had been labouring under for so long had come at last, after all.

Although we may be reluctant to admit it, considering the enormity of the crimes of which he was guilty, Jonathan Wild was human, and, though possessed of an iron constitution, yet he had so abused it that he could no longer set it at defiance.

Every hour saw him falling more and more into a state of stupor, and in the morning his condition was considered to be so desperate that stimulants were ordered to keep him alive.

But Jonathan, true to a purpose that he had formed, refused to swallow anything that was brought to him, and of course, it was folly to hope that they could force any liquid down his throat.

Jonathan's purpose was that, having failed in his attempts to escape, and having come to the conclusion that it was a thing impossible, he had decided at the last to cheat his foes.

They, beyond all doubt, fondly believed that they would lead him to Tyburn, and that he would there expiate the crimes of which he had been guilty.

That strange, mysterious hag, whose presence always caused Jonathan so much terror, had prophesied that such should be his fate.

And, above all, there was a consciousness within him that, strive as he would, he must come to that death at last.

But three days would have to elapse before the one came appointed for his execution, and his resolution was not to partake of a single mouthful of food or drink one spot of any liquid during that interval.

He fully believed that long before the dreaded Monday came he should be a corpse.

He should be meeting death; but yet, he felt tired of life, and he should die with something like a glow of triumph in his heart at having defeated his enemies at the last moment.

Among the officials of the prison there soon began to be some suspicion of the actual state of affairs, especially the Governor, who guessed what were his intentions.

To expostulate he knew was in vain, and any attempt to persuade him to partake of food he felt convinced would only serve to increase his obstinacy.

He tried other means—and means well calculated to answer the end he had in view.

Choice dishes of various descriptions were brought into the cell, and placed before the prisoner.

Jonathan felt, at last, the sharp pangs of hunger, and the sight of the tempting viands only increased them.

He looked upon them with wolfish eyes, and had great difficulty in keeping his resolution.

But with a firmness and stoicism wonderful to behold, he did keep it.

The food was untouched.

And so a second day passed, and, by the time night came, he was in such a state of deplorable weakness as scarcely to be able to raise his arm in the least.

But the pangs of hunger returned with tenfold violence.

He tried hard to conquer them.

But in vain.

Food was before him, lying temptingly within his reach, and, in spite of all his strenuous efforts, his eyes would constantly be directed towards it.

At last, with a cry like that which some famished animal might be supposed to give, he seized upon a piece of meat, and devoured it eagerly.

In his inmost heart he cursed himself for his weakness.

But he could not on that occasion control his appetite.

All command over himself was gone, and he could do no more than satisfy the present claims of nature.

When the men saw him eat they nodded their heads significantly.

They could guess now what would be the result.

CHAPTER DCCLII.

JONATHAN WILD COMMENCES HIS FATAL JOURNEY TO TYBURN.

ALTHOUGH the quantity of food of which Jonathan had partaken was exceedingly small, yet the effects of it were immediately manifest.

But his rage and despair to think he should be so weak after suffering so long were terrific.

In his mortification, he resolved to end his wretched life there and then, and, with this intent, struck his head violently against the stone wall of the dungeon.

The turnkeys, however, saw this instantly, and at once interfered.

That was a proceeding they could not permit, and, as they were four in number, they were easily able to master the prisoner.

Oh, how he wished for one small quantity of poison!—just enough to rid himself of life, and to enable him to escape the hangman's rope.

He renewed his bribes to the turnkeys, offering them fabulous amounts if they would comply with his demands.

But with common consent they refused.

There was good reason for this, for they knew that the cell was so constructed that the Governor could easily overhear every word that was uttered in it, and it was impossible for them to say at what precise time he would be listening.

The further efforts of the ordinary to bring the prisoner to contrition were as useless as the first.

But on the Sunday, Jonathan, in common with other prisoners, was marshalled into the chapel.

Then he was placed along with those condemned to die, and had to listen to the funeral sermon, with what different feelings may be guessed.

It was no novelty to him.

In times past, many and many a time he had placed himself beside some unfortunate prisoner, and gloated over the misery that he was enduring.

Now he was in that wretched place, and, looking round, he could not see one eye directed with a pitying glance upon him.

He felt that his own hatred of mankind was fully shared in by the human race.

He was like one accursed, and when the time came for him to die, there would not be one who would regret his fate.

From that time not another word escaped from Jonathan's lips.

When the service was over, he suffered himself to be led back to the cell.

But he kept his lips and teeth resolutely pressed, as though determined that no sound should escape them.

The chaplain came again, and this time he had at least a patient listener.

Jonathan, with his arms folded, leaned back against the wall, and, with his lips closed, remained in that attitude of dogged defiance during the whole of the time the ordinary addressed him.

It was an unthankful office that functionary had to perform.

But yet he acquitted himself of it admirably.

He was afraid, however, from the appearance of the prisoner, that, although the words he uttered fell upon his outward ear, yet they did not penetrate to his understanding.

Then once more light faded out of the cell, and, as it did so, Jonathan could not help being reminded that it was the very last time he would witness day change into night.

A few short hours now had only to elapse before the time came for his execution.

Now that the prospect was so close—now that death literally stared him in the face, he began to exhibit tokens of extreme agitation.

Despite the great weight of his fetters and his own weakness, he continued to roll about incessantly.

He never once during that night closed his eyes in sleep.

To his disordered fancy it seemed as though St. Paul's Church did nothing else but strike.

The hours flew by like so many minutes.

With the first beams of light came a visit to the cell.

Breakfast was brought and placed before him.

But he refused to eat.

Then the ordinary came again, and Jonathan turned aside his head, maintaining the same dogged silence as before.

After that there was the usual visit of the sheriffs, into whose custody the prisoner was given.

Then he was unchained from the wall, and led to the pinioning-room.

Here the remainder of his fetters were removed by the blacksmith.

Jonathan shuddered.

There was a movement among those surrounding him, and he knew the cause.

The executioner was approaching him.

He shuddered again when he felt himself touched upon the arm.

Mechanically he placed himself in such a position that he could be pinioned easily.

The roaring and yelling of the huge crowd without could now be heard with great distinctness, and Jonathan trembled at the sound.

He knew he should quail at the sight of so many faces all bent sternly and angrily upon him.

In good truth, however, he was more like a man in a dream, than in full possession of all his mental faculties, and he suffered himself to be led hither and thither just as those who had him in their custody desired.

Moreover, the whole of the interior of the prison of Newgate was perfectly familiar to him, and so it was with a kind of instinct that he made his way in any required direction.

Upon reaching the yard he did not look up, though he felt grateful for the fresh air that blew upon his face.

He marched on between the turnkeys.

He knew he was going to the cart.

But he did not look at it.

With some difficulty he was placed inside it, and then, helpless and inert, he sank down in a sitting position upon the coffin.

The ordinary as usual placed himself by his side, and the hangman perched himself in the front and grasped the reins.

All was then in perfect readiness for the procession to start.

Great preparations had been made by the authorities to preserve the prisoner from the violence of the mob.

So great was the popular feeling against Wild, that it was apprehended he would never be permitted to reach Tyburn alive.

The people would take the law into their own hands, and nothing but his death would appease them.

This, however, it was determined to prevent if possible.

A strong force both of police and military had been mustered, the greater portion of whom had taken up a position in front of the prison.

The remainder were in the yard from which the procession was to start, and as many had been crowded in as was possible.

At a given signal the huge doors were thrown open, and no sooner did they move than one tremendous yell arose from the mob outside—a yell that seemed to burst spontaneously from every throat, and which must have echoed far and wide over the City of London.

Most unmistakably was that yell one of execration, and when he heard it, Jonathan Wild crouched down and tried with might and main to get completely out of sight.

He justly feared the anger of the incensed mob, and looked around him with more interest than he had yet done.

A feeling of relief came over him when he saw how well he was surrounded by police officers and soldiers, and he began to think there might even be a worse death than that which the law had designed for him.

To be torn to pieces by a brutal and infuriated mob

was a fate from which everyone would naturally shrink.

Slowly the cart moved out under the archway.

The soldiers still kept close guard around it, and it was only the more distant spectators in the crowd who could obtain a view of the wretched prisoner.

But for all that, they continued to yell and roar with the full power of their throats.

The immense mass surged up against the gates, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that the soldiers could maintain their position.

Such a crowd as that had never before assembled in London.

Far and wide in every direction the people were packed as closely together as was possible.

Every window was crowded with faces, and every housetop contained a prodigious number of persons all gazing intently on the scene below.

And all up the Old Bailey, and down Snow Hill, and far away up Holborn in the direction of Tyburn the crowd was just as dense.

Well might fears be apprehended of the result of the gathering of such a concourse of people.

At the slowest possible rate the cart moved forward, and it was pretty clear if the journey to Tyburn was accomplished at all it would take a very long period.

The people behind, however, pressed forward continually, and with such united force that it was scarcely possible to withstand it.

Heavy missiles of various descriptions were hurled at the cart.

But few reached it.

The mounted soldiers so closely hemmed it in that no view of it could be obtained, except by those persons who occupied elevated positions.

One huge stone came flying over, however, and dropped upon the ordinary's shoulder.

He uttered a shout and dropped his book.

Jonathan was terrified too, and looked about him anxiously.

They would tear him limb from limb, he thought, if they could only once seize upon him.

"Curse them all, I wish they were in my place to-day and I in theirs! How I should exult in the sacrifice of them all!"

Over this sanguinary idea Jonathan pondered for some time, until indeed the cart stopped in front of the half-way house at St. Giles's.

It was well known that the procession, according to immemorial custom, would halt here, and therefore for many hours an immense crowd of people had assembled around, hoping to catch a sight of the prisoner at this point.

Refreshments were brought out as usual, and the landlord himself appeared upon the threshold with a bowl of punch in his hands.

"Here it is, Jonathan Wild!" he exclaimed. "I knew you would come at last, and when Jack Sheppard told me to take it back and keep it for you, I resolved to obey him. Here it is, drink it, and much good may it do you!"

While speaking, the landlord, holding the bowl of punch in both hands high above his head, walked towards the cart.

Jonathan at first seemed inclined to refuse to touch it.

But after a momentary pause he changed his mind.

CHAPTER DCCLIII.

THE EXECUTION OF JONATHAN WILD.—THE CONCLUSION.

EXTENDING his trembling hands, he took hold of the huge, massive China bowl, and everyone fully expected that he was about to place it to his lips and drink deeply of its contents.

He did place it to his lips indeed, but that was only to throw the landlord still further off his guard, who, not suspecting any injury, came closer still.

Then Jonathan, suddenly raising himself to his full height, and exerting the whole of the strength that yet remained to him, raised the bowl in the air, and dashed it violently, with its almost boiling contents, into the landlord's face.

NO. 158.—BLUESKIN.

There was a crash and a shriek of pain.

Jonathan echoed it by a burst of demoniac laughter, such as in olden times had pealed from his lips after the accomplishment of some barbarity.

He clapped his hands with glee, and the landlord, blinded, scalded, and bleeding profusely in many places, staggered and groped his way back into the inn.

This gratuitous injury excited the feelings of the populace to the highest pitch against him, and a desperate effort was made to get possession of him.

But the soldiers, although equally incensed, stuck firm to their duty, and repelled the advance.

By the order of the sheriffs, the procession was again set in motion, and strict instructions given that all possible speed should be made.

Those worthy men were indeed most anxious that that day's unpleasant proceedings should be brought to a close.

In accordance with this command the whole troop moved slowly on.

The corner of Oxford Road was gained, and for a short time they were able to move onward with less difficulty.

After that last act of cruelty, Jonathan had shrank down in his seat, apparently almost ~~horrified~~ ^{terrified} and in awe.

He trembled and ~~shook~~ ^{shook} with fear—not only of the ~~revenge~~ ^{revenge}, but of the awful death that was now so close to him.

Then he reached a certain point of the road from which, as he knew full well, a view of the triple tree could be obtained.

He knew it by the loud shout that came from the multitude.

All round the place of execution another crowd was gathered, already colossal in its proportions, but it was destined to be greatly swelled by those who were approaching.

In a short time it happened that further progress was impossible, the throng was so very dense.

Inch by inch the soldiers had to force their way, and every now and then, despite all their best efforts, the procession would come to a standstill.

It was on the occasion of one of these pauses that Jonathan Wild started suddenly, as though he had experienced an electric shock.

A wild, shrieking voice was heard, and directly afterwards a form appeared that Jonathan knew only too well.

In some inexplicable manner, it made its way between the soldiers, and stood in the little open space around the cart.

The form was that of the old hag who had on two preceding occasions prophesied that Jonathan Wild would end his days at Tyburn.

Extreme excitement was now visible in her manner.

She shrieked aloud, and clapped her skinny hands together.

"Man of blood," she exclaimed, in tones that had already become familiar to Wild's ears—"man of blood, the time I told you of has come at last! Was I not a true prophet? Now I shall be revenged! You took the life of one who was nearest and dearest to me—you took it wrongfully, as you know. It was you who murdered him at Tyburn. Now you are going there—you will reach it in a brief space now! There is no escape for you! The rope will be placed around your neck, and you will die as your victim did! I have seen it for a long time in the future—so long that I feared the day would never come. Now it is here at last, and I triumph! Jonathan Wild, farewell! I shall see you when you stand beneath the fatal beam, but my face will be undistinguishable from the others."

Just as she spoke the obstruction to the progress of the procession having been removed, a fresh start was made.

And in the same strange manner as she had appeared, the weird woman vanished.

During the time that she was speaking, Jonathan had gazed upon her like one who was spellbound.

He seemed to wish from the very bottom of his heart that he could remove his gaze or make some movement.

But both were impossible.

Tyburn was now very close at hand indeed, and how-

ever slow their further progress might be, it must be reached in a very short space of time.

Again Jonathan fell into that state of sullen apathy which he had on former occasions displayed.

And in this state he continued until the cart was again brought to a standstill.

This time it was within a few paces of the triple tree, around which a strong guard of soldiers had been placed many hours before, and who had had great difficulty in withstanding the tremendous pressure of the crowd.

Their ranks divided to allow the procession to enter the clear space that they had kept, and then once more they closed up, repelling the people with their bayonets.

Another jerk was given to the cart, and then it was brought beneath the fatal beam.

The executioner stood up and suddenly produced a coil of strong rope.

He stood upon the coffin, which was placed crosswise on the cart, and then he became a most conspicuous object.

His appearance was greeted by a universal howl of hatred, for although he was about to rid them of such a monster as Jonathan Wild was, yet the people could not overcome their intense aversion to him.

The executioner, however, only smiled grimly.

He was getting used to all that sort of thing, and knew what value to place upon it.

With considerable dexterity he threw one end of the rope over the horizontal beam, then catching it, he tied a knot so as to form a loop, which he drew tight, and then hung with his full weight upon the rope in order to draw it tight.

Much against his inclination, Jonathan was then compelled to rise to his feet and mount upon the coffin.

Now that the last moment had come he seemed inclined to throw off his passive demeanour, and to make a desperate effort at resistance.

But too many were around him for any such attempt to be in the least degree successful.

Before he was aware of it, his knees were tightly pinioned together, and he was helpless.

Around him as far as ever he could see was nothing but one huge sea of white faces.

All eyes were turned towards him, and every countenance had upon it an expression of the utmost abhorrence.

Then he felt the snake-like fingers of the hangman twining around his throat.

He felt the rope, too, as it was slowly passed round his neck.

At this awful moment he gave a last despairing glance around.

He looked up at the sky, in which the sun was shining brightly, and which wore a truly beautiful aspect, for only a few white, fleecy clouds speckled it.

Then his eyes were turned towards the ground, and by a singular chance they rested upon one face out of that huge throng.

No sooner did they rest upon it than a wild and terrible shriek burst from his lips—a shriek all could tell was wrung from him by some great agony of apprehension.

His eyes dilated with terror, and his whole countenance was truly fearful to gaze upon.

Muttered words came from his lips.

But they were spoken so indistinctly that none could catch their purport.

It is possible, however, that the reader may guess whose face it was that Jonathan had seen at this last awful moment.

It was the countenance of Jack Sheppard, who, carefully wrapped up in a cloak, and with his hat drawn down over his brows, had taken up his post at the place of execution, in accordance with the vow that he had long ago made.

He saw the great enemy of his life—the bane of his whole existence—before him.

Jonathan saw him, too, and his horror may be imagined, for he was fully impressed with the notion that it was a supernatural being he beheld.

No idea was more firmly fixed in his mind than that Jack Sheppard was no more.

Could he but have been made aware that he had escaped him, and was still alive, it would have been another pang added to those he already suffered.

But the preparations were all complete.

The hangman descended clumsily from the rude cart and went towards the horse's head.

The ordinary, who had picked up his book, again stood by the prisoner still occupied in prayer.

It was just then that Wild's eyes were attracted by another face next to the one that had caused him so much fear.

This was Blueskin's.

He recognised it instantly, and he knew that the officers were anxiously in search of him.

It would have been a great revenge if at that moment he could have pointed him out to the police officers and caused his capture.

But it was not to be.

He tried hard, however, to make himself understood.

He wished to point, and tugged at the rope which confined his arms behind his back.

These motions of his, however, were entirely misunderstood by those around him.

He tried to speak—to call out who it was that stood there watching his dying agonies.

But the rope was pressing tightly round his throat—so tightly, indeed, that he imagined it prevented him from speaking.

Then he became aware of a dreadful fact—a fact that completely drove all other thoughts from his mind.

The cart was moving slowly beneath him.

He made the most furious efforts to retain his feet.

He tried to grasp hold of the coffin between his ankles, and struggled with might and main to avert his inexorable doom.

It was in vain, however.

Those struggles only hastened his death.

A sharp cut with the whip was administered to the horse, who gave a sudden bound forward.

The cart was removed entirely, and, with a sudden jerk, Jonathan Wild was suspended from Tyburn Tree.

There were then a few convulsive quiverings of the limbs, a universal spasm of the whole body, and all was still.

Jonathan Wild was dead.

Now that Jonathan Wild has met with the fate he so richly merited, this story naturally reaches its completion.

The enemy of all that was good, and true, and noble, and the friend of every species of vice and villany is no more.

The body having hung for the allotted time, was then cut down and rudely cast into the ill-made coffin prepared for its reception.

It was carried back to the prison, and afterwards hung in chains upon a gibbet.

The people slowly dispersed.

But among the last to leave the spot were Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

All arrangements had been made for their future proceedings, and all they waited for was that the death of Jonathan Wild should be accomplished effectually.

Therefore, as soon as they could get free of the crowd, they mounted the horses that were waiting for them at no great distance, and galloped swiftly away.

To remain longer in England they felt was impossible, every moment of existence there would be fraught with a thousand dangers.

Besides, there was nothing to endear them to the land of their birth, or make them unwilling to quit it.

Elgworth Bess, too, was exceedingly anxious to journey to some foreign land, and therefore, in anticipation of the events that actually occurred, she had made every preparation, and, along with Steggs, had left the Manor House and journeyed to Gravesend, where they had embarked in a small vessel that they had engaged expressly to convey them.

Here they waited for Blueskin and Jack Sheppard to arrive, and this was the point towards which they hastened after the execution of Jonathan Wild.

They arrived in safety, and, alighting from their panting steeds, sprang into the small boat that was waiting for them near the shore, and in a few moments afterwards were on board the bark.

It was a happy meeting between them all, and great

anxiety was shown for the anchor to be weighed and the vessel to be fairly got in motion.

It turned out, however, that there was no immediate cause for alarm.

No one guessed that any particular events were taking place on board that vessel, and no attempts were made to molest it.

In a slow, lumbering fashion it made its way down the Thames, and then stood out to sea.

The weather was fair, the wind favourable, and within a short time they came in sight of the shores of France.

They landed at an obscure part, and hastened to gain the interior of the country.

They were now completely safe from all pursuit, and had nothing to apprehend.

Edgworth Bess had around her those friends who had

done her such good service, who had freely sacrificed everything on her behalf, and who had on more than one occasion actually saved her life.

It rejoiced her to think that the time had come that she could recompense them in some measure for all that they had done for her.

She was rich—possessed indeed of abundance of wealth, and she lavished it freely upon them.

In what portion of the world it was that they afterwards took up their abode, or whether they moved frequently from place to place, none knew.

By the instructions given, a certain sum of money was forwarded at regular intervals to a bank in Paris, and this amount was regularly fetched by a man of sad and downcast appearance.

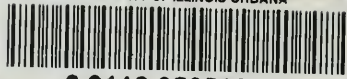
That man was Steggs, and he remained with the heiress until his death.

[THE END.]





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